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COMMANDO EXTRAORDINARY

A Biography of Otto Skorzeny

CHARLES FOLEY

With a Foreword by
Major-General
SIR ROBERT LAYCOCK
Chief of Combined Operations 1943-47

WAR AND WARRIORS SERIES

"I cannot and will not leave Mussolini to this fate. He must be rescued before these traitors surrender him to the enemy. You, Skorzeny, are going to save my friend."

With these words Adolf Hitler entrusted SS-Hauptsturmführer Otto Skorzeny with the Second World War's most desperate mission: to pluck Italy's deposed Duce, guarded by hundreds of picked soldiers, from his isolated prison high in the Appenine Mountains and bring him to the Führer. How the towering, scar-faced Skorzeny, the war's most illustrious commando, pulled off Mussolini's rescue is merely one episode in this classic biography of the Third Reich's Scarlet Pimpernel.

Otto Skorzeny wanted to be a flier, but his six-foot, four-inch stature and his advanced age (over the hill at thirty-one!) made him unsuitable for Göring's Luftwaffe. The Austrian engineer then volunteered for the Waffen-SS, the combat forces of Hitler's elite guard, and saw service in the bitter fighting on the Eastern Front. A shrapnel wound which left Skorzeny temporarily unfit for combat brought him his opportunity: after a desk job with the Main Office for Reich Security, Skorzeny was ordered to form an elite SS commando unit.

Skorzeny's first exploit, the dramatic rescue of Benito Mussolini, was only the first of a series of daredevil feats which made him the most feared man in Nazi Europe. He went far behind enemy lines in Yugoslavia to seek and capture Tito, narrowly missing the elusive Red partisan leader. When Hungary's Admiral Miklos Horthy sought to abandon his alliance with Germany and betray his country to the Russians, Skorzeny kidnapped Horthy's pro-Soviet son, then led a lightning raid on the Burgberg, the admiral's castle-fortress.

(continued on back flap)

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The Noontide Press
WAR AND WARRIORS SERIES
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by Charles Foley

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FOREWORD

By Major-General Sir Robert Laycock, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O.
Chief of Combined Operations, 1943–47
Appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Malta, 1954

This is an ominous book. In his fast-moving account of Otto Skorzeny's missions the author establishes that the airborne privateer who rescued Mussolini laid the basis of his success on a study of British Commando operations. Disconcerting as it may be to learn how our own ideas were turned against us in the last war, an even sharper challenge to complacency comes with the discovery that such novel doctrines are today being adapted behind the Iron Curtain for future use.

If another world clash should come, which God forbid, its opening phase may be decisive, for nuclear explosives have put a heavy premium on surprise attack. What is not, perhaps, so obvious to those unfamiliar with the kind of activities described here is how small numbers of picked men may find ways of introducing atomic weapons, among others, into their enemy's stronghold even in advance of the outbreak.

This development is only one example of the way in which highly-trained volunteers may be employed to outwit the big battalions. During the last world war, as Charles Foley vividly demonstrates, the shortcomings of text-book defences were exposed again and again by such unorthodox means. The record of his main protagonist furnishes examples of this technique in a variety of circumstances. From Skorzeny's exploits the author then turns for parallels to Colonel David Stirling's "hush-hush" Special Air Service.

Now, for my part, I have never met Skorzeny, but I know a great deal about Stirling. He is a leader of quite exceptional resource and one of the most under-decorated soldiers of the war. More than once he would have won the highest military honour

the Sovereign can bestow, were it not for the rule that a senior officer must be present to vouch for the circumstances of the citation—and senior officers were never well placed to witness Stirling's raids behind the lines.

The principles underlying Stirling's actions—and evidently Skorzeny's too—are similar in inspiration to the chess gambit which takes the opponent's queen with a couple of swift, unexpected moves right through his defences. Both men had to contend with the mistrust aroused by new ideas: such is the fate of innovators. After all, the original Commandos were maintained in spite of the War Office: the early units owed their existence to the goading of Sir Winston Churchill and the persistence of Sir John Dill. Even after they had won recognition the Commandos were lamentably misused by stereotyped leaders until they entered the command of a few far-seeing generals such as Montgomery, Dempsey and Horrocks. At the end of the last war, and regardless of the honours they had won on every front, most of our military authorities were openly delighted to see the disbandment of the Army Commandos.

Under a new régime, handsome amends have been made. Stirling's regiment has been re-formed and the Royal Marine Commandos, now sponsored by the Admiralty, have won fresh laurels in the Far East. The logic of this book is that another step forward in the realm of *strategic* shock attack is now due and the reader, after considering the evidence arrayed, may well feel that it should not be postponed.

The form that such a step should take is set out in a series of proposals to create a strategic assault force for tasks of exceptional hazard and delicacy. That other Powers can, and probably will, join in the game of sabotage and liquidation behind the lines makes it more urgent than before that we too should be capable of playing it, but of playing it best and playing it at once. Another war may allow no time for improvisation: blessed is he that has his quarrel just, but thrice armed he who gets his blow in first.

This project for a special force is singularly well suited to the adventurous and individualistic spirit of the British character; it is also one that may well offset the immense preponderance of numbers and armament which we are all too likely to face. And

happily, the precision technique suggested does not require the slaughter of hundreds or thousands of people in order to reach a chosen target. Nor can the deterrent value of such a force be overrated. Its creation would serve notice on any potential aggressor that not one of his vital war-making installations, including his atomic plants, could be adequately guarded if he dared to attack us. He would also understand that any aggressive move would put his own life or liberty in danger.

I began by calling this an ominous book. I shall conclude now by venturing the opinion that the omens may still be propitious if we take note of them. No nation can surpass ours in the imagination and boldness required for the sort of work envisaged—the paralysing of vastly superior forces, the destruction of an opponent's sense of security for his most precious weapons and supplies of war. There is ample talent for such an enterprise in the country that produced the last war's Commando leaders. Their successors—given the needful support—could carry terror to the heart of any aggressor, however powerful he might be, by daring, bluff and general unpredictability of plan.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

WHILE stories of individual daring and success in the last world war already abound, no account that I have read so far attempts to go beyond the incidents portrayed with the object of discovering the method in the madness of the adventurous few. Such is the task of this book—a task in which the author's inadequacies must be made good by friends who have a better claim on public attention.

Our main witness to the revival of this personal element in warfare is Otto Skorzeny, and the choice is one which his Allied opposite numbers greeted with interest and pleasure. One of the first whom I consulted, Lieut.-Colonel M. J. Calvert, D.S.O. and Bar, M.C., of Burma fame, declared that Skorzeny was the ideal example to show what an individual commander, given his head, could achieve in modern war. Special Air Service officers who had explored similar techniques agreed; their depot adjutant, Major Anthony Greville-Bell, D.S.O., was tireless in his search for comparisons in the brief but illustrious records of this regiment. The closing chapter could not have been written without the co-operation of Colonel David Stirling, D.S.O. Nor could I have found anyone better fitted than our leading exponent of amphibious warfare, Major-General Sir Robert Laycock, to bring the whole subject into focus with an authoritative Foreword.

Many others, in England and abroad, were generous with help and criticism. On one question all agreed, that although ideas may have no frontiers one cannot dissociate them from the preconceptions of the minds from which they spring. Skorzeny fought for Germany: he saw the war through German eyes. I have refrained from "correcting" his viewpoint where it differed from my own and I have avoided all moral issues as being outside the area of survey.

While filling in the wide gaps in my knowledge I incurred

further obligation. In particular I must acknowledge the kindness I received from Mr. Allen Welsh Dulles, who lent me his most valuable report on the German "underground", from Major Karl Radl in allowing me to call on his record of the Gran Sasso expedition, and from Major Hummel for his clear exposition of the activities of the frogmen led by him. Much tedious research was curtailed by the Chatham House librarians and the archivists of the Imperial War Museum and the Pentagon Building. Lieut.-Colonel Donald McClure, late of the U.S. Army's War Crimes Group, was good enough to read through a manuscript of the chapter dealing with the trial; Wing-Commander Yeo-Thomas, G.C., M.C., contributed his impressions as a witness at the court.

I must, in conclusion, pay tribute to Colonel Skorzeny for his robust spirit under questioning.

C. F.

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Skorzeny's own sketch map of the Gran Sasso operation

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Mussolini triumphantly escorted from his Campo Imperatore prison by his rescuers

The garrison subdued, men of the attacking force reassemble on the mountainside

(*Photographs by Rex/Ullstein*)

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The front page of *Signal*, the German High Command's wartime propaganda magazine, celebrates the rescue

Mussolini is congratulated by his host on arrival at the Wolf's Lair airport

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Skorzeny's plan of action in Budapest

Horthy's palace, viewed from the Danube

(*Photograph by E.N.A.*)

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Where the frogmen struck at Nymegen

(*Copyright Reserved, Imperial War Museum*)

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Colonel A. H. Rosenfeld reads the charge sheet to Skorzeny at Dachau War Crimes Camp

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During the trial: Skorzeny, "No. 1" among the group of German officers accused together at Dachau, takes notes for their defence

(*International News Photos*)

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With his chief Defence Counsel after the trial

Skorzeny today. Arriving at a Spanish airport

CHAPTER I

> Nothing is so impudent as success—unless it be those she favours.
>
> JAMES ROBINSON PLANCHE

FOR nearly forty-eight hours, at a grand crisis in the war, a temporary soldier, a major aged thirty-six, found himself in supreme control of all the German forces at home and in the occupied countries of Europe. No one appointed him to this post—he saw an opening and stepped into it.

A year earlier he was unknown among the millions who fought. A year later he was swept up with the broken remnants of Hitler's armies.

But during those two years he had rein unprecedented for one so new to command. He raised, behind every battlement of beleaguered Germany, a legion imbued with the spirit of attack —and attack by any imaginable means so long as it was unexpected. In the last twenty months of the Reich that was to last a thousand years he planned, directed and himself led a series of missions which were unparalleled in scope because they aimed at influencing the course not merely of a single battle but of the war.

There was the business of keeping Hungary in the German camp after the Regent Horthy had signed a separate peace with the Russians; he did it by storming the Regent's castle and escorting him to exile, so that the Hungarian armies fought on to the end and a million German troops were rescued from Stalin's trap.

There was the business of sowing chaos behind the Allied lines during the final "Battle of the Bulge" in the Ardennes; he trained an "American Brigade" of disguised Germans and caused such widespread confusion that even General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, was a prisoner in his own headquarters for a week.

There were many other exploits which glistened with the same new-minted stamp; one could not, at the time, be certain that the same mind was behind them, yet who was there among Hitler's heel-clicking officers with such originality in thought and action except one man, the rescuer of Mussolini? Today we know that surmise to be true.

For that is how it all began, with a *coup de main* which reprieved the Duce, bringing him back to the stage after his fall from power so that he was able to act out his epilogue and, like Napoleon, enjoy his "hundred days".

Mussolini's liberation from an Alpine prison in the fourth year of the war will be talked about after more portentous events are forgotten. The setting was theatrical enough, the daring that carried it off was prodigious, but it was the sheer improbability of the event which jolted every mind and made people on both sides of the front wonder if they were dreaming.

Just as the Italian dictator was about to be delivered to the mercy of the Allies he was snatched up into the sky. At one moment his jailers had him safely caged. The next—he was gone.

The world was deafened by a storm of triumph. From Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Tokyo, the rescue was exalted like a major victory in the field, with bulletins which trumpeted the name of the young officer who led the raid: Otto Skorzeny, Otto Skorzeny, Otto Skorzeny—until dazed, perhaps, by its very repetition, people hardly remarked that it was a strange name for a German, just as the imagination behind the blow seemed unlike routine German methods.

But to one Allied leader, at least, the evidence of a new force at work in the Axis camp was no less challenging than the flight of a captive Caesar. Mr. Winston Churchill rose in the House of Commons to survey "this amazing and fearful world war", and when he had given an account of the rescue, went on to say:

"We had every reason to believe that Mussolini was being kept under a strong guard in a secure place, and certainly it was very much to the interests of the (new) Italian Government to see that he did not escape. Mussolini believed that he was being delivered to the Allies; this certainly was the intention and is what would have taken place but for circumstances entirely outside our control."

What circumstances were these? The most perturbing was the appearance of this comet which had flashed into the autumn sky, Otto Skorzeny. Churchill was not the man to miss the significance nor to withhold his admiration of the phenomenon. And so he concluded:

"The stroke was one of great daring and conducted with a heavy force. It certainly shows there are many possibilities of this kind open in modern war."

That, as far as the Western Allies were concerned, was all. Whatever "possibilities" Mr. Churchill had discerned were overlaid by the demands for unity with his allies, America and Russia; by the preparation of vast amphibious operations; and, more immediately, by the stubborn campaign in Italy. On the German side it was otherwise.

Winston Churchill grasped at new ideas, none more quickly. But whereas to one of Churchill's upbringing the exceptional must be an expedient, to Hitler, as a street-corner revolutionist, the heterodox was the breath of life. Every step in Hitler's rise to power and in his march of conquest was taken by outwitting and overturning minds weighted by the harness of tradition. Now that the tide of the war had turned against him, he found the one man he could trust to go ahead on his own and carry off huge gambles—an up-to-date d'Artagnan with a dazzling technique.

On the wings of this first, incredible success, Skorzeny soared over the heads of his contemporaries into Hitler's approval. And although the two met seldom and always rather formally, the aura which this favour lent Skorzeny enabled him to get at least token sanction of the High Command for enterprises which in another pilot's hands would have splintered on the reefs of bureaucratic obduracy.

By the time Skorzeny had become chief of Germany's special troops the war was as good as lost. Most generals were resigned to losing it in the right way and according to the soundest precedent; Skorzeny, from a position equivalent to that held across the Channel by Lord Mountbatten and his successor as Chief of Combined Operations, General Laycock, was bent on any risk to win it. Again and again the gathering darkness was lit by a flash which revealed the mark of Skorzeny's handiwork—improbability.

Germany's doom could not be averted. Then came a notable sequel: the arrest of Otto Skorzeny, who was to be solemnly accused by his interrogators of being the German soldier "most responsible for prolonging the war".

Here was an unprecedented charge to level against an individual who commanded no great armies and had no say in politics. Skorzeny was not even, like Hitler, a fanatic ready to pull the world down on his head. Quite the contrary. He took up arms when the call came and fought as best he could; after Germany was beaten he offered his surrender with the rest. And so far from "plotting" with the German army chiefs, almost everything he accomplished was done in the teeth of professional opposition or indifference.

We are obliged, then, to turn our inquiry to the methods Skorzeny employed and to the objectives he sought. And here we reach the crux of the matter. There were commanders on the Allied side as valiant and no doubt as clever, but none had the *chances* which came to Skorzeny of going himself into the middle of a country or an army and, by throwing it into confusion, changing its moral and political shape.

This discovery prompts an uneasy question. If plans of the type in which Skorzeny excelled had received from the beginning the unstinted backing of his General Staff, if Skorzeny had been able to count—as he never could—on the weapons, the preparation and the men he wanted, what limit could be set to the damage he might have wrought? And given the full weight and advantage of a triumphant Germany at the time, say, of Dunkirk, where would the contrived confusion have ended? Would Skorzeny still have been accused of "prolonging" the war? Might Germany not have won it?

After Skorzeny's eventual release by the Allies two attempts were made by Soviet agents to kidnap and whisk him off to Moscow; then he moved out of reach. Even before the war ended, while Skorzeny was bringing off one hazard after another, the Russians must have decided that this novel sort of soldier's mind was something they should take over. Already the Kremlin had plenty of captured German generals, even a field-marshal or two; here was a rarer adversary, the exponent of an heretical style of warfare in which the individual came into his own against

the mass and the machine. It was the same desire to possess the talents and discoveries of the West which led the Russians to carry off whole teams of German atomic and rocket experts to work behind the Iron Curtain. It shows that the rulers of the Kremlin thought, like Churchill, that there must be "many possibilities of this kind".

Skorzeny had been denounced by the Allied Chief Prosecutor as "the most dangerous man in Europe"; that the Russians were willing to violate the zonal borders to acquire his box of tricks provokes speculation on what use they meant to make of it. If the Russians had persuaded Skorzeny to apply his wits to the task, our leaders might now be the unsuspecting target of many an imaginative exercise. Today, from the Kremlin, Comrade Skorzeny might be devising an airborne raid on the White House, the Pentagon Building or the Quai d'Orsay; he might be perfecting a scheme for plucking a President from his bed or for appearing uninvited at a Cabinet in Downing Street.

Such enterprises—based on his view that the only aim in fighting is to win as quickly as you can—spring naturally from Skorzeny's doctrine of attack. Academic as they happily seem today, it may be just as well that he is the last man likely to want to work for Russia and that his talent is still on this side of the Iron Curtain.

Skorzeny's war-time field of study is one which concerns us all precisely because it has been almost intentionally overlooked. It is a no-man's-land which most generals disdain and many brave men fear to tread: a border zone that changes its outlines from war to war. Some of us have made sorties into this shadowy area between soldiering and politics: Skorzeny camped on it. Today he sees it as a main battleground of the future.

I am anticipating. Until quite recently Skorzeny was a half-remembered name in the lumber of my war memories. Then by chance the man and some of his works came into my life.

We were talking, a friend and I, one autumn morning before luncheon. Mist was falling on Pall Mall; across the street an outline in bomb-gothic recalled the day the Germans hit the Carlton Club. From that we must have turned to other shocks to the established order; hence to the singular figure of Skorzeny.

My friend took up the theme. "Skorzeny," he said. "There was a soldier, if you like. Nowadays we are all so painfully respectable, but seldom were we given the glorious chances Skorzeny saw—and took. He mixed high politics with dynamite. He turned the battle routine inside out. After the war the Allies tried to hang him. I like to think we helped to get him acquitted."

The speaker was one of our brilliant younger commanders, who surprised his friends by staying on in the Army after the war. A vigorous critic of tradition, his assurance in the field is matched by a contempt for danger at staff meetings and in discussion with General Officers in the Mess. And as the incident he had mentioned was related I recognised that he saw in Skorzeny a fellow-spirit.

"I never met him," he began, "and our intervention in the proceedings was irregular . . . a chivalrous uprising in the first days of victory. You will remember there were quite a few of us at Versailles from various fronts: colonels in the twenties, 'colourful' brigadiers, sailors and airmen of temporary high rank who had managed to find a reason for visiting Supreme Headquarters, and Paris.

"One day some of us heard Otto Skorzeny had been arrested by the Allies in Germany and was being accused of all sorts of villainies; trying to kill Eisenhower was one of them. We saw nothing wrong in that: the more we thought about it the more indignant we became. After all, British commandos had tried to raid Rommel's headquarters in the Western Desert—among other such affrays. Most of us had done things they didn't put in Army orders; and we were decorated when we got away with them.

"We all knew quite a bit about Skorzeny's activities: Intelligence had put out a special dossier on him. It seemed to us his only crime was being active in a line of country the regulars dislike.

"So we wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for War. A copy went to General Eisenhower . . . to make sure. The letter said that if Colonel Skorzeny, as leader of the German commandos, was to be punished for doing his duty, then we, too, begged to be placed under arrest. We were willing to plead guilty to similar charges and submit to the same treatment."

He went on: "Well, they didn't arrest us, but we heard later that some of the charges had been dropped and that finally Skorzeny was acquitted. Good luck to him; you can't make war with rosewater, but in spite of his unusual ideas I believe he fought it clean."

This episode stirred my curiosity, and my interest was further roused by this remark which my friend threw in as if it were some kind of commonplace: "Skorzeny fought the last war by the methods we shall have to use for the next—if we wake up in time."

I began then to wonder about Skorzeny and his "unusual ideas". What had become of him? What was he doing now—was he still alive? I had come across puzzling rumours from time to time . . . a visit to a London library reaped a harvest of clippings from the Press: newspaper reports which, beginning with what seemed fact, soared into an empyrean of phantasy.

First, there were messages from Paris on the alleged attempt to kill General Eisenhower, though "murder" was the term preferred. There had been a man-hunt by all the police and military of Europe for Skorzeny, at large and in disguise behind the Allied lines. Then, as chief of the werwolves sworn to carry on the war after the Armistice, Skorzeny had slipped into Denmark—a dozen Danish resistance leaders had vanished; it was "supposed" that the werwolves had disposed of them.

"Skorzeny captured!" the newspapers rejoiced. Photographs of the arrest showed Skorzeny in manacles; and then, in spite of repeated reports that he had broken out, we had him brought to trial.

The War Crimes hearings dragged on and were lost sight of; there was an inexplicable acquittal, but Skorzeny was still detained—being "too dangerous" to set free. The prisoner decided otherwise and head-lines sounded the alarm: "Skorzeny gets away."

A French newspaper identified the fugitive—or someone like him—on a Channel service to London. A Welsh hospital was guarded; Skorzeny might not know that its most celebrated patient, Hitler's errant Rudolf Hess, was no longer there.

And so it went on, with Skorzeny seen now in Buenos Aires, where General Peron charged him with an expedition to seize the

Falkland Islands; now in Austria, searching the Alps for Hitler's buried loot; and now again conducting a secret conclave of a "Nazi-Fascist International" in Rome. A full year of this sort of thing; then an American magazine said that an espionage ring working under the code name of "Spider" had sent out tentacles to the United States; Chief Spider, Skorzeny.

Such energetic malignity in the wings by a villain who never took the stage! And then, at last, a French newspaper caught him in the spotlight and produced the most formidable of scoops: a picture, head-on and full length, of the "most dangerous man" in a setting that was unmistakable. The monster was in Paris; he was walking down the sunlit Champs-Élysées.

Uproar in the French Chamber; a solar-plexus punch for a Government which—or so the Communist leaders roared—had been harbouring a Nazi murderer. Ministers were assailed; obedient to the Party call, a mob poured down the boulevards. At the fashionable Rond Point they fell on the offices of the newspaper *Figaro*. Riot police were belaboured with chairs and tables snatched up from pavement cafés.

When order was restored to the capital Otto Skorzeny had vanished again.

A London newspaper flew two special investigators out to take up the chase. They dashed through several countries and even across to Africa, but drew blank.

There, some months ago, the trail of clippings ended; my paper-chase came to a stop.

Where could the fellow be? I inquired through friends in South America; the German colony there knew nothing of him. The Quai d'Orsay assured me he was no longer in France. In Italy and Germany he would have met too many war-time acquaintances to pass unseen; in the smaller countries a stranger was quickly noticed; the likeliest place left was Spain.

Thousands of Germans had sought refuge and a livelihood behind the Pyrenees. Once the Spanish police were satisfied with a foreigner's credentials he could even work under an assumed name. Inquiries from abroad were not encouraged: General Franco had been ostracised since the war; now let other countries mind their own business and leave him to his.

While I was negotiating for a Spanish entry visa, another

newspaper photograph settled it. The picture showed Skorzeny at a dinner-table and it had been taken, the caption writer said, by a cameraman who had poked his lens through a window in Madrid. That alone was good enough for the front pages, but the photographer's agility was doubly rewarded, for beside Skorzeny, fork in hand, was Dr. Hjalmar Schacht.

Schacht, Hitler's Finance Minister and "economic wizard"! The inference of the head-line, "What are they plotting?", did not, perhaps, take into account Schacht's break with the Nazis which nearly cost him his life, but such nuances were unimportant. The Spanish visa was stamped into my passport and next day I was on my way.

The conviction had been growing on me that unless Skorzeny were indeed a sort of superman out of the "comic" papers there might be a simple and sufficient reason for keeping out of sight. I did not take "neo-Nazi" conspiracies too seriously: the war was too recently over, the destruction too complete. Nor had I seen anything in the record, admittedly a slender one, of Skorzeny's war-time activities to justify an assumption that he was a political fanatic ready to pit himself against the reality of Germany's utter defeat. Above all, no German I had met had heard the man's name mentioned before the war; so far from being politically important he appeared to have risen from complete obscurity—and now, quite likely, wanted nothing better than to return to it. Why not accept this natural supposition—and advance from there? Granting that Skorzeny was normal enough to wish to live his life in peace, it would have to be pointed out to him that he was going the wrong way about it: very much better to give the world an explanation which would satisfy its curiosity than to keep open the gates of speculation by silence and evasion.

By the time my plane had touched down at Bordeaux for refuelling, I had plumped for a policy of bold persuasion—and where could one find a better ally in pressing the virtues of public enlightenment on Skorzeny than in that irrepressible publicist Dr. Schacht? I had run into Schacht soon after his acquittal of war crimes at Nuremberg: since then he had been flitting from one capital to another prescribing cures for other people's

economic ills. If he knew Skorzeny, he would arrange an introduction.

But, already, Schacht had gone. Landing at Madrid I found he had flown on to Paris the same morning. However, friends had seen the doctor: they led me to others who at length conceded that Skorzeny was still in Spain, living "not far from Madrid". He could be asked to see me, though they held out little hope. To end equivocation I said with obtuse heartiness that I had come a long way to meet their man and I would like him to lunch with me—next day. A few hours later, to the evident astonishment of our intermediaries, the invitation had been accepted, and in a way which suggested that my quarry wanted me to know he could come out into the open if he chose. So far from urging some furtive rendezvous, he agreed to Horcher's, one of the three best-known restaurants in Madrid, and named the hour of two-thirty, when all Madrid begins to think of food.

Even in Spain, Germans cannot learn to be unpunctual. So it was in some disquiet that I waited alone over my sherry as the room filled with the chattering marquesas, the hand-kissing Ministers of Franco's Cabinet and the visiting Ruhr barons and Americans-from-the-Ritz who make up Horcher's following. It was nearly three o'clock when a shadow darkened the tiled alcove where I sat. A huge figure stood over my table. "How are you?" the stranger said. "I am sorry; my car was held up. Otto Skorzeny, at your service."

The voice was a fine, untroubled bass, but it was fit for larger spaces, and as I got to my feet I was aware of a drop in the conversational hum. People looked around; then they looked upwards—and so, from my six feet, did I.

I am not sure what I had expected Skorzeny to look like. Newspapers insisted on a "giant"; nostalgic for Chicago's gangster days they had also dubbed him "Scarface". I suppose I had made the usual allowances, but here, with my hand in his grasp, was a man of towering proportions. "Scarface Skorzeny"—the term fell pat: from the left temple a chalk line scribbled its way to the corner of his mouth and across a massive chin. Life so far was living up to the legend.

As if to make amends, Skorzeny wore a subdued grey flannel suit, and his dark, springing hair was brushed firmly into place.

His faintly apologetic air was all that could be asked; only a glint in his slate-grey eyes betrayed amusement. Later I heard a woman, of the sort that can be counted on for that kind of remark, say that Skorzeny was "a splendid animal", putting her in mind, she added, of a man-eating tiger on parole.

We sat down at a white-covered table while Herr Horcher himself pressed through a cloud of acolytes to pay the homage of his art. He had been Marshal Göring's pet *restaurateur* before moving from Berlin to Madrid; now he conjured up hearts of artichoke, lobsters' claws cooked in cream especially for the "Herr Oberst".

"You are well known," I ventured. That brought a wide grin. "Unfortunately," he said; "it seems I need no passport."

We drank some wine and deployed our small-talk. My guest used English as a workaday implement without subtlety or sophistication. It was enough; behind the pleasantries and alongside a ready sense of humour, his mind was sudden as a club.

I had rather feared to discover in Skorzeny what de Madariaga has called "the German state of fizz and fuzzle", that steamy, psychological morass of the Teutonic soul with its habit of boiling over. It was to be expected. Here, after all, was a German demi-god, whose name was used as if he were an international gangster and a thug. But I found Skorzeny lacked the vapour of self-pity; his outlook was commendably dry.

Shortly, I launched into the argument I had prepared: encouraged both by his immediate admission that he wanted to be left alone by the newspapers and by finding that his common sense met reasoning half-way. He agreed that lying low had failed to shake off pursuit; he admitted that as a result of all the mystification there was nothing too ludicrous to be said or printed about him. Well then, I urged, it was time for a change of policy; let him end this cat-and-mouse game and the pursuit would soon fall away. The appeal, I admitted, was an interested one, for I myself had many questions to put him, but after all, he would have to give the world an account of himself some day—why not speak out now and be done with it?

Skorzeny had listened patiently. When I paused, he smiled. "All this rests on the supposition I have nothing to hide. How

do you know that is so?" And he leaned forward with an air of quizzical enjoyment.

Luckily Herr Horcher intervened to advocate roast sucking pig. This having been agreed, Skorzeny laughed and said: "Don't worry; there is no one I cannot look in the face, but I hoped that if I kept out of the way the rumour-mongers would have less to go on. I underrated my adversaries—a capital mistake in strategy."

The room was close, the wine refreshing. Course succeeded course in the steady Spanish *tempo* which is said to open the pores of the soul and the windows of the mind.

Then, Skorzeny brought out his final objection. He felt it unbecoming for a defeated soldier to thrust himself forward; and especially one who was, let's say, a shade conspicuous already.

I acknowledged that his scruples did him honour; they might well have been shared by some others who had changed sword for pen, perhaps as "a continuation of war by other means", the moment they were out of uniform. But the worst bitterness of war was past and what he had to tell was of widest interest.

As he still hesitated, I tipped the scales with the story of the hushed-up protest in Paris when British officers jumped to Skorzeny's defence after his arrest. His eyes lit up: he, too, had felt this spirit of freemasonry between "front-line soldiers" on either side.

By now it was five o'clock—no time to sit over the glasses in any country, even Spain. Skorzeny said: "I am not ashamed of what the men under my command did in the war or what I have been doing since: I will tell you anything you want to know. But first I should like to clear your mind on one question. I am not interested in politics. I don't believe in any Nazi revival; history never turns back, and for my part I don't want it to. It has taken years to resume my life and my career where they were broken off by the war. I have no appetite for glory; I want to live it down. It is true that we tried out some techniques for the future: if you want to hear about them, well, why not? You shall listen to what happened; then you can judge."

On that we parted until, in the evening, I drove out to an address he had given me. A pleasant little villa, white-painted,

with a grilled peephole in the door through which, in Spanish fashion, a servant scrutinised the visitor.

The room in which Skorzeny greeted me was still shuttered; cool and dim after the sunlight of the street, it might have been in Chelsea. We sat under a chandelier in chairs covered with cretonne. The frames on the wall held flower pictures.

"So this," I mused aloud, "is the parlour of the Chief Spider. Where are the trap-doors and the dictaphones; when do the plotters gather?"

As if to make up for the prosaic setting Skorzeny took off his wrist watch and put it in my hand. "Mussolini time!" he said.

I looked at it, a fine, gold time-piece, and on its back a Napoleonic initial "M", with the date of the rescue: 12/9/1943. Skorzeny poured a drink as he told me how Mussolini had it inscribed for him and it was the one possession he had recovered from souvenir-hunters after his arrest. "But now," he said, "to work. What do you want to know?"

That is how this narrative began. I asked first about his early memories and his apprenticeship in arms: matters of which he spoke with simplicity and with some surprise that they should be thought worthy of attention. Next day, in the siesta hour, he came out to the balcony of my skyscraper hotel room. We talked, while Spain slept, of the war years. He showed a grasp of facts, figures, dates and names which marks the disciplined mind, but what pleased me was his sensitivity in matters less material: remembered conversations and the tone of voice, the moods and inflexions of men under stress. Some of these recollections arranged themselves in a pattern; others were strung together on a chain of reasoning which had begun before the opening of each episode he described and did not end when the episode had closed. My first inquisitiveness appeased, we worked together through his career, retracing its beginnings, considering not only what he had done but the thought behind each action. This procedure took time; Skorzeny had a hundred other things to do. So after a few days we fell into a routine of spending together intervals between his business appointments: each time he went off I would turn back on my notes to record, while it was still fresh, every new detail he had given me.

I knew before our meeting that Skorzeny's experiences must

elucidate many mysteries, and I hoped to hear more of those "unusual ideas". What I did not anticipate was that his history would take on the spell-binding qualities of a novel by Dumas.

Who could resist a recital which puts kidnapping into the political armoury, so that the first stage in resolving a crisis is to ravish a dictator's heir from a meeting in a rolled-up carpet? That is typical of Skorzeny's "direct diplomacy".

I learned of his design to deal with the Italian Crown Prince Umberto—this was dovetailed into a plan for carrying King Victor Emmanuel and his whole court off from Rome; and again of how, disguised, he went to France and laid an invisible noose about the Government—one tug would have wrenched Marshal Pétain, with his Ministers, into captivity.

Skorzeny's pace grew hotter as the end grew nearer; it was neck or nothing all the time. New York, it was laid down, must be bombarded by U-boats. London should have a rain of human bombs—the deadly flight to be led by Hitler's favourite pilot, a woman who had learned to ride a V-1, Fraulein Hanna Reitsch.

So it went on, until my note-books were peopled with a host of disputants, sketched in against a backcloth that extended from the English Channel to Kiev and from the gates of Moscow to Budapest.

And now, a warning to the chronologically inclined. Skorzeny clapped spurs to his career after being made Chief of Special Troops. From Mussolini's rescue onwards it was a breakneck gallop in which promotion from captaincy to command of a division seems incidental; he felt himself to be leading several lives at the same time. The salient events on this helter-skelter rush are taken in order; lesser events may suffer.

Through most episodes the personal rôle of Skorzeny is pronounced. I was put in mind of this before leaving Madrid. A British liaison officer had been asked by our Embassy to inquire into yet another rumour—this time Otto Skorzeny had sent a group of German ex-officers to help the Egyptian Government against the British.

"No doubt," said the First Secretary, "this is a story like the rest, but is there any simple way of *proving* it's not true?"

"Why, yes," was the reply. "You can remind them that it is

not Skorzeny's habit to send his officers ahead of him. He always goes in first."

Skorzeny claimed the right to go with his men and lead them himself. He knew that when you have laid out your plan in detail, when you have thought of every conceivable contingency, there still remain, as the best briefing of all, the two words, "Follow me!"

And finally, this record is something beyond the adventure story of a soldier with the gift of leadership and "some unusual ideas"—it is the journal of an exploration which may be as significant for the future as was Charles Darwin's voyage in the survey vessel *Beagle*. Striking into the unknown, Skorzeny has come back to confute the unimaginative with evidence of the sorties he has undertaken; and, in the process, to point the way to projects of illimitable scope.

CHAPTER II

> Had he been here, he would have thought of something else.
>
> CASTELNAU, *on Napoleon*

> In war the heroes always outnumber the soldiers ten to one.
>
> H. L. MENCKEN

IF Otto Skorzeny was no ordinary soldier, that may well be because he never wanted to be a soldier at all. For this Nazi paladin was neither the Prussian Junker nor the storm-trooper prejudice entitles us to expect. He had hardly set foot in Germany before the war. He had never handled a rifle, except for hunting purposes, until he was called up.

The fall of France came without his having fired a shot. So far from maligning his luck in being cheated out of action, his relief was unaffected. The war, he thought, was over; he had done his duty. Now everyone could go home.

Skorzeny's youth offers few clues to the man he later became: an upbringing almost exasperatingly normal; no discontent, divine or diabolic, to kindle the fires of recusancy—a belief in the reasonableness of the universe that is still unabashed today.

The home in which he grew up was typical of the solid, once comfortable Vienna bourgeoisie. Men of his mother's family had all gone into the army as a matter of course. They were old-style officers of the Hapsburg monarchy; in frogged jackets and shakos they went the round of garrison duty or spurred their chargers against Turk and Tartar. During the three centuries through which his family's course can be traced from the East Pomeranian village of Scorzencin (from which its name was taken) there is no suggestion of any member having displayed an unseemly brilliance or originality.

Otto's boyhood ran through the worst years of Austrian inflation, when the need for keeping up appearances imposed a

stoic discipline on gentility. He can still remember his first taste of real butter: "It was when I was fifteen," he says. "My father told me there was no harm in doing without things; it might even be a good thing not to get used to a soft life. And he was right!"

This last exclamation reveals what Skorzeny has never ceased to be, a puritan. There is a Cromwellian streak in his character which makes him accept hardship, and even pain, as salutary. While enjoying good things in fair measure—"Have a cup of brandy!" he will cry, in a startling idiom of his own, when you call on him—he avoids excess; above all he is irritated by the stories of debauchery which, in books and films, are inseparable from duelling at the universities, because they are a slur on the spartan ritual he knew.

Student duelling, of course, is unlike what we mean by fencing. It was not so much a matter of warding off the opponent's blows as of accepting them without flinching. One did not think, as the hot blood trickled down one's face, "That hurt!" One thought: "Did I move my head? Did I blink?"

It was during the tenth of the fifteen duels he fought that Skorzeny's left cheek was opened by a sweeping stroke; stitched up on the spot without the use of anaesthetic, it produced the famous scar which links him in popular imagination with the underworld. The odour of carbolic in which the swords were freshly disinfected clings to his remembered anxiety lest the umpire should stop the fight if he lost too much blood and give the victory to his rival. He managed to last out the bout.

Skorzeny believes such minor blood-letting taught boys to be men. "Often later I was to be grateful for the self-discipline we learned in our student clubs," he says. "I never felt so bad under fire as I did at eighteen when I had to fight my first duel, under the sharp eyes of my fellow students. My knowledge of pain, learned with the sabre, taught me not to be afraid of fear. And just as in duelling you must fix your mind on striking at the enemy's head, so, too, in war. You cannot waste time feinting and sidestepping. You must decide on your target and go in."

Most of his duels arose from sporting challenges, but one, at least, was an affair of the heart; a week or two after the encounter, the Viennese dancer concerned became engaged to marry someone of whom neither principal had heard.

In his austere childhood, imposed both by parental authority and by economic rigour, in an earnest devotion to manly pursuits, he was simply one of his generation. Most of our captains of war have been born into leadership and their whole schooling trained them to command. In Skorzeny we can descry no special intellectual ability; his cramped youth did not encourage the independence which leadership demands. There is no "boyhood of Raleigh" to raise our expectations, no visions and no time to day-dream.

Even at school he chose "practical" subjects: maths, physics, chemistry. His diploma thesis at the university was written on "The Calculation and Construction of a Diesel Engine". He had little love of reading for its own sake, unlike some British commandos who, it is said, were apt to go into action carrying volumes of verse with flowers pressed between the leaves.

High-flown romanticism left him merely puzzled. He lacked the capacity for hero-worship and thought politics time-wasting. Drawn in almost casually during his early twenties to applying for a Nazi party card because he thought it would relieve Austria's chronic economic distress if she were joined to Germany, he never made a speech or stood for office. Indeed, when one of the first acts of the triumphant Nazis was to ban duelling he protested to the point of imprudence. Were not these new men ready to stand up for their beliefs with a weapon in the hand? Seemingly they were not; in disgust he took up road-racing with cars provided by the Party's sporting section and won three gold medals That was the sum of his "political activity"—there were always more interesting things to do.

No Lothario by disposition, he still liked pretty girls. His early marriage began with a meeting at a swimming-pool; the honeymoon in Italy over, a more lasting passion resumed its rule. "Work, work, work!"—Skorzeny has always been driven by the urge to do things when the need is seen, at once.

Fate gave this most un-Austrian proclivity an early trial, and a dramatic one: failure would have led to serious trouble—at the least to some bloodshed, at the worst to a clash of nations.

The setting was Vienna in the spring of 1938, during one of those crises which sent the storm signals flying across Europe. The Government had fallen; Hitler's nominee as the new Chan-

cellor was speaking on his balcony; before him, in the great square below, a frenzied multitude was spread. The air was full of hysteria and threats. It was a day when anything might happen.

Among the overflow of the vast crowd in a street alongside the Chancellery was young Otto Skorzeny. He had driven there on a summons from the Vienna Gymnastic Club, one of many societies which, in times of factional tumult, tried to assist the police in keeping order. While he was listening to the boom of loudspeakers he saw the side gate of the building open and a limousine drive out: in the back seat was President Miklas of Austria. A moment later the chief of his Gymnastic Club was at his elbow.

"Skorzeny, you're a sensible fellow," was his greeting, and he hurried on to say that Miklas was on his way to the Presidential Palace, where there was every chance of a battle between the regular guards and a group of Nazi defence squads who were on their way to take over. What Skorzeny must do was to get to the Palace before Miklas, so as to smooth things over between the rival troops. He could say he had come in the name of the new Chancellor, who would be told of his errand at once.

Skorzeny got into his car and set off at top speed, but by the time the limousine came into sight it had been joined by two or three other cars he could not pass: the Nazi defence squads had tagged on behind Miklas already and a clash with the guards seemed inevitable.

When Skorzeny drew up before the Palace the President was already disappearing inside; Nazis with brassards and revolvers were tumbling out of their cars. Skorzeny pushed past them into the lobby, where he saw Miklas mounting a staircase: the President was half-way to the top when he caught him up. Just then, from a landing above, a Guards lieutenant with several soldiers at his heels started to run down the stairs, shouting, "Halt there, or I fire!"

The lobby had filled up with defence-squad men, pistols at the ready. Skorzeny and the President were caught between two fires. Safety catches clicked; the next moment bullets would have been flying. Skorzeny shouted the first words that came into his head: "Nonsense! Quiet, I say."

A sudden silence was broken by President Miklas. "What does

all this mean?" he demanded. Then, to Skorzeny, "And who the devil are you?"

Skorzeny's answer, loudly spoken, was that he came from the Chancellor, who would vouch for him if telephoned—and he told the lieutenant, facing him on the next step up, that he would be held personally responsible for any shooting.

The lieutenant's courage ebbed at the thought of "personal responsibility" in some political imbroglio. A truce was called while they went to the telephone. The Chancellor spoke in turn to the President and to Skorzeny, whom he thanked for his presence of mind. And now, the crowning irony: the rival forces in the Palace dispute both looked to the young intruder for "orders". He decided that the lieutenant should ensure security inside the building, while the defence squads mounted guard outside. Honour was satisfied: the men went their ways. Again, Vienna was at peace.

These few minutes were enough to hint at qualities which were to make Skorzeny an easy choice for tasks out of the common run. When the chief of his Gymnastic Club sought him out it was as "a sensible fellow" who would prick the swelling bubble of a crisis. While yet untrained in arms or in the habit of command he showed an aplomb which quelled the itch to fire—and a sure sense of his opponent's weakest point.

"Scarface Skorzeny": this label of the licensed killer hardly fits the picture. His very success as a soldier is made interesting by an inborn aversion to violence; by a knack of seeing the funny side of unpleasant happenings and by a friendly interest in *people* even, as his observations on the Russian campaign show, in people who should be distasteful to a Nazi officer: "squalid" peasants and "dumb" Red soldiers. On the outbreak of war his first regret was for the English and French friends he and his wife had made on their holidays in Italy; jogging through France in the wake of the *blitzkrieg* armies he was relieved to see his soldiers giving drinks and cigarettes to British prisoners: the young men of Europe had not yet learned to hate each other.

What spark transformed this rather stereotyped conscript into a man who caught his soldiers' loyalty and trust? It might have been ambition; he enjoyed promotion and medals as well as

anyone, but for a climber he sadly lacked pliancy and pace when a main chance offered itself.

For instance, towards the end Skorzeny commanded a division on the River Oder before Berlin, and should have claimed major-general's rank but he remained a lieutenant-colonel because he could not find time to fill up the required forms. Nor was he a respecter of persons or powers if they sought to over-ride his notions of duty. He was rash enough to snub the Nazi Party and later to treat even the mighty Himmler with scant courtesy when he interfered with the job in hand. Three times, at least, while on the Oder he flouted such authority, once inviting a fate which brave men fear more than battle wounds: court-martial.

He was aided by a tolerance which usually enabled him to look down with humour on the stupidities and exasperations of life. It upheld his spirit and that of men around him; even in captivity he could sometimes impose his will, by some strange magic, on those who held him at their disposal.

When war came Skorzeny was putting all his efforts into a Vienna building firm in which he had bought a share, but as he had to go, his first thought was to avoid the boredom of army life. Having done some flying, he offered himself to the air force as a pilot. "Much too old," was the reply. He was thirty-one.

Instead, he had five months' desultory training in an Air Force communications depot in Vienna; from there he was posted as an officer-cadet to the artillery of the Armed S.S.—a military force which fought alongside the army and was distinct from Himmler's political phalanx. His transfer came on February 21, 1940: a few hours later that day his daughter Waltraut was born. She was a big, strapping girl, and Skorzeny went off in fair spirits to join the Adolf Hitler S.S. Regiment in Berlin. "Win a medal if you like," was his father's farewell, "but it doesn't have to be the Knight's Cross."

He went to Berlin, and infuriated the Prussians he met by describing their capital as a hideous brick-pile compared with his beautiful Vienna. He also got to know the drill sergeant on his own ground. It was a reserve battalion which was being built up by time-honoured methods. If, as Skorzeny willingly avows, he

learned much on the barrack square, not all of it was what his instructors hoped.

"I saw how some of the 'regulars' sinned against the fine human material that is brought to them, how stubbornly they bent the individual will and crushed personality. It seemed to me the reverse of what was needed for the tasks which a soldier in modern war can carry out." From this seed sprang his doctrine of turning the training of the well-drilled enemy against them; a precept that never failed to work.

Officers, like their men, were cast in rigid mould. Versatility was not expected, nor welcomed as a rule. Shortly after the French Armistice (and a picnic trip across France as an officer cadet with the rank of sergeant), Skorzeny found himself in Holland in the midst of what were obvious exercises for invading England, and here he astonished his superiors with what, to his civilian mind, seemed a modest show of resource. Heavy tanks were lined up to go aboard the ships, but the army had no ramps strong enough; Skorzeny was asked if he could design one to take their weight. This quickly done, he found a local factory where the ramps could be made. Warned that Dutchmen would work only at the point of a revolver, he cozened them instead with schnapps and chocolate. They kept going all night: next morning he awoke his commanding officer to see the first tank driven aboard.

Not long after, a sharp brush with bureaucracy nearly cut short his career. He needed tyres for his lorries on the road; the N.C.O. at a depot where he stopped refused to part with any unless he could show written authority from above. Skorzeny promised jocularly to bring his guns and blow up the dump if the man did not see reason. He got his tyres, but three weeks later he was recalled from leave to explain his conduct to a full general and suffer a reprimand.

In April, Jugoslavia. Skorzeny heard only that the Belgrade Government had been overthrown and the new rulers had torn up their pact with Hitler. The Germans went in. It was Skorzeny's baptism of fire. That night he saw his first corpses, neatly laid out for burial, and he could not help the melancholy thought that it was a soldier's fate to do everything in rows: he had to fall in in a row, he marched in a row, ate in a row. And when he was dead he lay in a row.

A few days later Skorzeny went out with a platoon to patrol the hills; he let a much larger body of the enemy walk right into him before jumping up and calling for their surrender. The bluff won; the hands went up. Returning with sixty-three prisoners, three of them officers, he was promoted First Lieutenant and cited "for bravery in the face of the foe". And that without pressing a trigger; the lesson was not lost on him.

Ten days and Jugoslavia was over—another nation subdued; another army, this time of thirty divisions, destroyed. It was a text-book invasion that upheld Hitler's invincibility. That summer he turned on Russia.

Skorzeny had travelled east, Lawrence's *Seven Pillars* in his kit. In the troop-trains rattling through Poland the men sang "Marching against England": they believed they had been given leave to pass through Turkey and Russia—to reach the Middle East. With Rommel's Africa Corps attacking from the other side the German jaws would meet on the British Eighth Army.

But, then, a day or two before reaching the Soviet frontier they stopped. Skorzeny's unit went on, by road, travelling at night. Behind the fields of corn, the barns and haystacks, they saw guns dug in and tanks ready to attack.

From outposts near a wide and muddy torrent—the River Bug—sentries on wooden towers could be seen on the farther shore. That night of June the general who briefed them said: "The enemy is Russia. We go over at five a.m. Gentlemen, the fate of Germany, nay, of Europe, depends on us. We shall not fail. Within a few weeks we will parade in Moscow."

So it might have been, but for elements outside the calculations of the General Staff, and one factor in particular, the Russian character.

Before we decide to fight again on Russian ground, Skorzeny says, we should make up our minds what kind of people we are taking on. The "brutish Russians" broke the back of Napoleon's *Grande Armée*: Hitler scorned them—and Germany paid in millions of dead and mutilated sons. We others have no excuse for ignorance.

Many Germans will tell you about Russia; many can talk of little else. They say it was as different from any other campaign as, say, a war with Selignites on the far side of the Moon. One can

still sense in the countries which sent armies into Russia an underswell of panic at the thought of going there again. Skorzeny calls it "the Russian neurosis": a despairing weariness, an unreasoning fear, it can infect companies, regiments, divisions—and eventually they become a rabble.

Skorzeny, who harboured no illusions of racial superiority, saw his comrades' contempt for Russia turn to respect, then to something close to dread. After eighteen months he was taken out of the line, so he was not tried too far—just far enough. The Russians, he objectively concluded, are the only people who know what they are talking about when they speak of "total war".

At the start it was another text-book advance, with an impetus nothing could stop. Skorzeny covered fifty miles in the first day, three hundred miles in the week. The haul of prisoners was gigantic—three hundred thousand at Minsk; followed by two hundred thousand at Smolensk and six hundred thousand near Kiev. The air throbbed with the drums of victory. The High Command announced: "Russia has been beaten in fourteen days!"

Skorzeny drove with his unit into Brest-Litovsk, where the Bolshevists had signed peace in 1918; although the world was told the town had fallen, the Russians seemed unaware of it. A fusillade came from the inner casements, where a garrison held out, denying the railway junction for troop-trains from Berlin and Warsaw. Driven at last into the cellars, the Russians answered surrender calls with bullets. The cellars had to be flooded. The Russians fought on like cornered rats, and like rats were drowned.

The invaders swept on towards Moscow. Skorzeny felt another premonition on the day a company of sappers, left on the triumphal road to guard a bridge, were wiped out almost to a man. The assailants had struck across an "impassable" swamp, made their kill and vanished.

A third omen: Skorzeny raced ahead to take over the power station at Godoro: it was intact, but picked quite clean; not so much as a bulb-holder had been left behind. To ecstatic Germany the war might be over: Godoro suggested that, for the Russians, it had only begun.

They started their real resistance with pinpricks. Trucks would disappear on leaving the main road; then whole convoys went

astray—troops sent to find them did not return. Skorzeny discovered that German road-maps were practically useless; nor did miles matter: Russian spaces were immeasurable, and into the vast, empty landscape the enemy dissolved. Every man dug himself a hole, six feet down with a fire-step, and every man seemed to be a sharp-shooter. Into the ground, or behind bushes which sprang up overnight, went guns and trucks. You could never be sure when you would run into a hidden hornet's nest, and as the Germans went on there were more and more of them. The Russians appeared, stung, vanished.

Then, south-west of Moscow, at Smolensk, the Russian Army stood. Skorzeny was bivouacked one night with two crack SS regiments at Jelnja—a hundred miles or more in advance of the main army—when he heard this challenge on the radio from Moscow:

"Hero of the Soviet Union Marshal Timoshenko has been put in command of the Soviet forces before Smolensk. The Hitler war dogs on that sector will be annihilated."

It was the Germans' turn to dig. Smashing through the cornfields came a school of new monsters: Stalin had loosed his T34 tank, and German armour could not stand against it. Where the staff does not foresee, the soldier must improvise; soon with bottles of petrol and lighted rags Skorzeny's men were stalking the 30-tonners. Sometimes a hand-grenade would be tossed down into the canon's throat. It was man against machine and often man won—yet when a Russian tank was disabled the crew never gave in; if they scrambled out of the turret it was only to shoot down a few more Germans with their revolvers.

Russian indifference to death and suffering is something Skorzeny began to understand when, the Soviet tank attack broken, the enemy sent over flesh and bone to drive through where steel had failed. Day after day the infantry were mown down; still they came on. One morning Skorzeny crawled up to an advanced post where a friend was directing a battery of howitzers; he might have been hit, he thought, because there was a curious lull in the firing. He found the gunner officer only half-conscious: not wounded but drunk. Vodka bottles were scattered about. His friend mumbled that he had been sickened by too much bloodshed; he could stand no more.

Skorzeny took over the field telephone. The howitzers were concentrated on a gap a few hundred yards wide where the ground was strewn with thousands of dead and dying men. He knew there were often ten attacks a day; another was due. As it came, Skorzeny signalled, and the guns, already zeroed, fired. The Russians came right on. One wave after another rose and fell: another took its place. At last Skorzeny's stomach turned; he, too, drank to stupefy himself.

The rains came early. Roads dissolved; tree-trunks laid across them were sucked in. But even as he was floundering with his column in the morass, Skorzeny had to admit that whatever was stuck in the mud, the Russian mind was not—the enemy came darting into the attack as though moving in another element. Everything has to end, even mud in Russia, and after a spell of campaigning on the Ukrainian front, to which he was seconded, it was dry enough to resume the march to Moscow.

The last defence line before the capital was overcome. Everyone had his "occupation orders": Skorzeny's were to take over the power supply. The Kremlin's cupolas beckoned on the horizon; it was to be blown up to celebrate the downfall and mark the grave of Communism.

But already snow was falling and it was getting colder. Twenty below zero . . . thirty. Skorzeny's men, trying to dynamite tanks out of the ice, cursed the High Command in their cosy quarters—since Hitler had seen victory in the summer skies the generals had loyally refrained from sending out winter supplies, equipment or even warm uniforms. And now the Russians released their winter thunderbolt—up to a hundred fresh divisions, led by cavalry and sledge-borne troops, fell on the German armies from nowhere.

"Nowhere," as so often in Russian affairs, turned out to be Siberia. Against all the reckoning of Western logisticians this immense force had been brought thousands of miles over the decrepit, over-loaded Trans-Siberian Railway.

The Germans staggered back, knocked flying by the hurricane which struck them. Only the grimmest will, a determination that the rout of the *Grande Armée* should not be repeated, staved off collapse. Many units broke and fled; others were rallied. Skorzeny says of this time of terror and misery: "Our men were always ready to do what we asked of them. If they ever failed, it was only

through the weakness of us officers." Somehow the retreat was stemmed; the mangled armies were rolled into hedgehogs around towns and rail junctions. There they hung on.

And there, as they fought for breath, they were assailed by a host of spectres which arose from the dead battle-fields of the past summer.

Skorzeny explains: "It is like this. You go into Russia, win tremendous victories, advance hundreds of miles. Prisoners flow back, an endless river of humanity with one guard to five hundred of them. The fields and forests are a graveyard of captured tanks and vehicles left to rust.

"When you retreat . . . they all rise up to meet you. This is how it happens. Thousands of prisoners slip away into the forests. New leaders cross the lines to them by night. Abandoned guns and tanks are secretly patched up. A host of special troops are dropped from planes skimming the snow; careless of broken limbs, they jump by moonlight without parachutes. And so there is a striking force where none was before."

Every German who lived through that winter ordeal got a special medal—survival in itself was acknowledged as a feat. To Skorzeny, the whole campaign was worthwhile for the chances it afforded of studying that supreme conundrum, the Eastern soldier.

The Russians, he found, could march incredible distances, sleep in wet rags, live on roots from the fields. They had stomachs that would digest anything: he saw prisoners tear raw chunks from a long-dead horse and march on, refreshed.

Such insensibility is a high military asset. It meant that they could drink from marshes and shell-holes while the Germans had to send ten or twenty miles through hostile territory for water. They could even exist without supply columns. Before one big attack Skorzeny was assured the troops opposite had no transport left at all; yet they never ran short of munitions. Prisoners explained that villages behind the front had been emptied of women, children and old men; in a human chain the people had to pass munitions from hand to hand up to the fighting line. Petrol was rolled along in casks. Lacking food or shelter, thousands of these people died. But the Red Army carried on.

The gentler feelings had no place at all. When his detachment

overran a military hospital Skorzeny found surgeons hacking off limbs, scarcely pausing to see whether the patients would live or die. He saw one man walk out of the ward alone the day after both arms had been amputated, expecting no help and getting none.

After the German victory at Viasma, Skorzeny's men had to stop prisoners from throwing dead and badly wounded comrades together into mass graves. When the living had at last been extricated, they were tossed into carts if still unconscious—the rest went on foot. Skorzeny saw one Russian soldier whom he recognised as a woman; her shoulder, half shot away, was crudely bandaged. She met his gaze with hatred. Behind her hobbled a corporal, his leg blown off from the knee, a stick tied on to the bandaged stump.

No room for pity, no awareness of horror. Near Smolensk, where Skorzeny escaped a random bomb, two or three villagers were wounded. Others rushed to them—not, as he assumed, to give succour, but to strip the dying of their clothes and boots. He came on an aged couple in a hut. Her husband was past working, the woman said, and she lacked strength to push him out into the snow to die—would the Germans do it for her? In another house they surprised a Russian soldier asleep. He got up, went outside and put himself against a wall, waiting to be shot.

Skorzeny would decide these people simply were not human—and then he would come on prisoners singing, with tears coursing down their cheeks.

It was what our grandparents would call an Asian Mystery; and there, according to Skorzeny, they would be getting "warm".

"Everywhere I go," he says, "I still hear the Russian character explained by 'primitiveness' and 'mysticism', or alternatively by the Communist ideal. The fact is—they are Orientals. That is what shocked and puzzled us: to find Orientals fighting in Europe. In Korea later the Americans were stunned by the 'Chinese hordes' which crossed the Yalu River to fall on them, but, after all, that was in the East, where you expect to meet Orientals. We were brought up to suppose that the Russians were just another sort, rather an inferior sort, of European. We were therefore more surprised when the truth dawned on us than the Americans were

on the Yalu; we were as astounded as the Central Europeans must have been seven hundred years ago when the yellow swarm of Genghis Khan burst upon them.

"Obviously the westerly White Russians, Ukrainians, and so on, are more like us than the rest, but for some reason history seems to have tarred the whole two hundred million of them from Arctic to Black Sea with the same brush—and they are just Orientals. Once I got this into my head, their characteristics became natural. I began to understand the callous fatalism of the Russian, to see that his apparent contentment in suffering is a mask for his refusal to lose face. It all fits in. It fits in with the Chinese way of bursting into hoots of laughter when someone bumps his head against a doorpost or cuts his throat or falls out of a bus and breaks his head. It reminds you of the little Japanese who says 'Let's play Imperial soldiers', and one boy says 'I'll be sergeant', and the rest line up; then he goes down the row slapping each of them as hard as he can in the face while everybody shouts with glee.

"It explains, when you see it in this way, the need of the Russian to look to a 'Peter the Great', or a 'Lenin', and always to a 'Mother Russia'. In the Far East an unending line of ancestors or traditions from Confucius to Mao-tse-tung tells you that everything has been decided for you.

"The attitude to life and death is typified by a village where every third family had been wiped out by bombing, and the survivors said, 'Oh, well, if they hadn't died in that way they might just as easily have died in another.' That was in South Korea; villagers used to talk in the same way in Russia. It has nothing to do with Communism, being much the same under the Czars. The new education has only made the Russians easier to handle in the mass and bettered the leadership."

These, however, are no small improvements. The Soviet soldier, Skorzeny found, was not only tough, cunning and instinctive, but he also showed high qualities of improvisation and technical ingenuity. He was never at a loss: one spare part would be made to replace another, tyres would be stuffed with straw to keep lorries going. He was a master of camouflage and deception, and of devices such as the "invisible" bridge: built below the surface of a muddy river, it was used only at night and could not

be spotted by day. Russian planes and tanks, lacking many gadgets, were all the sturdier for that.

In the last year of the war the Red Army forced down the throat of the invader a full dose of his own medicine. They subjected the Germans to the same *blitzkrieg* and pincer-movement technique which they themselves had suffered earlier on. It was obvious that the West had nothing now to tell them about war, while what the Russians could still teach the West was not so easily learned.

Skorzeny is not among those who believe Russia to be invincible. While agreeing that Hitler paid the forfeit for his overconfidence, he sees no need for a rebound in the direction of exaggerated fear: the "Russian neurosis" in its cold-war form. Even after that first winter of retreat from Moscow the German armies swept on again and might have brought down the edifice of Soviet power had it not been buttressed by supplies and promises of help from America and Britain. Russia can be beaten —but only by an invader who faces facts and who applies new techniques derived from a realistic study of the last encounter.

In the last days of December 1942, while all Germany held its breath for the fate of Field-Marshal von Paulus' army at Stalingrad, Skorzeny was invalided home. He returned to Vienna with a wound, an Iron Cross and the illness that was to pursue him for years. In Russia he had left his copy of the *Seven Pillars* and the last of his illusions: the fires of the Eastern front which steeled his character also magnetised it against shams.

CHAPTER III

> I had to go up for my examination for promotion to major. I failed gloriously, achieving a record in obtaining eight marks out of a possible 200 in Military Law. How lucky that wars wash out examinations and I have never been asked to do another since.
>
> LIEUT-GEN. SIR ADRIAN CARTON DE WIART, V.C., in his Memoirs

How did he get the job? Why did his destiny pick Otto Skorzeny for the Mussolini adventure and so lift him from the regimental rut to become overnight a military prodigy?

Chance, in the shape of a chronic illness, had brought him back from the Russian front and dumped him in a Berlin office classified as "fit for home service only". Chance thus saw to it that he should be on the spot when Hitler, jolted by the daring of British sea and desert commandos, ordered the High Command to try the same game. And chance placed a university acquaintance of Skorzeny's in the department which was thereupon charged with the selection of an officer to train the new "special troops".

If, therefore, Skorzeny had not been the victim of his gall-bladder, the opportunity to wage new kinds of warfare might never have occurred. Yet the passionate energy with which he seized that opportunity was of no chance origin; it was generated by the Allied call from North Africa for Germany's unconditional surrender.

Meeting in the glow of the Casablanca Conference, Roosevelt and Churchill may well have intended their declaration as a pious pledge to Stalin that they would not treat with Hitler on any terms. But however soothing its influence in Moscow, the declaration rang in other ears like a tribal challenge: Berlin called

heaven to witness that the Allies were bent on destroying the nation; war-weary millions were stiffened to win or perish. Until that day in February 1943 Skorzeny had taken things as they came. Casablanca hit him fair and square; it was a goad as effective as that with which Frederick the Great rallied the Prussian Guard: "Dogs, would you live for ever!"

There was nothing subtle in the way Skorzeny made his decision, as he explained it to me. "For anyone with blood in his veins there is, at certain turning-points, only one way to go. A man who can still see a choice of two roads then may be a clever fellow—I could not say much more for him."

He argued his way into an active unit, the 3rd S.S. Armoured Division, only to be let down again by dysentery and sent back to his repair depot. Then fate played one of its tricks with the offer of a "secret" job which would make him practically his own master and allow him to work up a school of warfare on "commando" lines. The term was adopted to cover the whole range of surprise attack by comparatively small bodies of picked men; it is in this wider sense, rather than in the limited tactical use of regular Commando troops, that the word was popularly used.

So unworldly was Skorzeny, so untutored in the arts of circumvention, that he never stopped to wonder why such an enviable appointment should be conferred on a junior officer with no strings to pull. The reason is not far to seek. Hitler had asked for "commandos": he should have them, and at once; the High Command were even willing to adopt the British term as evidence of zeal. And someone must be found to launch the new formation: not a career officer, because he might become puffed up with ambition and try to raise it to real importance. What was needed in such cases was someone "suitable", presentable, and unaspiring. One can visualise the selectors, when Skorzeny's friend put forward his name with the remark that he was kicking his heels in Berlin, going through those confidential reports that hover in the background of every young officer's life: "Good war record, temporary commission, a head for technical detail, sober-minded . . ." He would do very well!

So they settled on a safe nonentity and turned with relief to more serious problems. After all, they could not complain; the

High Command had arrived at the fourth year of the war before the distasteful question of having independent "commandos" was pressed on them by the Leader. (In England, too, "special troops" were fathered on the War Office by adversity. Only after Dunkirk was Churchill able to send forth raiders with blackened faces and clasp-knives to help restore British self-respect.)

Now the war was going badly for Germany: Stalingrad lost, Rommel in flight, the blow was poised which would split Italy from the Axis. The High Command and its Leader had forfeited their titles of infallibility; enemies with land, sea and air superiority on every front were mustering for the siege of Fortress Europe. No help, no hope in sight. Manifestly the moment was ripe for the raising of commandos: conditions were desperate.

On April 20, 1943, Lieut. Skorzeny was breveted Chief of Germany's Special Troops, Existing or to be Created in the Future, and given a rank that indicated the modest expectations attached to that grandiloquent appointment—he was promoted captain. A mixed company led by a Dutchman was found, renamed a battalion, and put under him; a second such battalion was to be built up by degrees. Among the impedimenta wished on to the new command were three "training schools" of spying and sabotage: mysteries into which their new chief had yet to be formally initiated.

Shortly after his advancement Skorzeny was ushered into the presence of the famous Admiral Canaris, Hitler's Intelligence Supremo: it was a painful interview, if not for reasons he might have feared. Instead of testing the newcomer's qualifications for the secret service part of his job, Canaris spent a full three hours wrangling over the transfer of some junior officers who sought employment with Skorzeny—and then put off deciding.

Skorzeny was dazed by the encounter. In later months, when the sensation was repeated and became familiar, he came to recognise that Canaris had given him his baptism of fire in the war of the "higher echelons". How lucky for him that he seldom met, in the early days of his first command, so exalted a master of obstruction! Canaris sat with the military caliphate, in the quiet heart of a cyclone; there all was still. Outside the storm raged. Dapper figures in the red-striped trousers of the General

Staff directed a whirlwind of forms, orders and applications; too often Skorzeny was lost in this blizzard of paper as he battled to set up and equip his outfit. Somewhere beyond the miles of filing cabinets and the human walls of minute-writing mediocrity were Departmental Chiefs; somewhere behind them, immutable, infinitely aloof, the High Command.

Radl saved him from despair; Karl Radl, a gay comrade of student days whom he met providentially in Berlin and made his adjutant. Skorzeny alone could never have matched his bureaucratic adversaries with their single-minded devotion to preserving the order of things and their place within that order. Officials were irked by his enthusiasm and objected to having their thinking hours stretched by his troublesome requests. When he pressed for action beyond a point where his demands could be ignored, well, they knew many a snare which could be set for young men in a hurry and could enjoy many a crow of retributive triumph when he punctually fell into them.

But Radl had read for the Bar; marked out as a future judge when the war began, he found in military regulations a fascinating child's game compared with the Central European jurisprudence he had studied. With Austrian irreverence he indulged the "beautiful nonsense" of bumbledom: instead of arguing with officials he capered alongside them on the road which led to total absurdity. Bureaucrats skilled in the art of evasion found themselves tripped up by their own red tape and badgered by Radl for more and more forms until they cried for mercy. In the demonology of the new unit their opponents at G.H.Q. became "The Generals", a slightly comic term evoking brass-bound complacency and the flash of a rebuking monocle in the Senior Officers' Mess. Later on Skorzeny was to meet German officers of high rank and brilliant gifts who did their best against the creeping malaise of bureaucracy. By then it was too late to make amends. Letters signed on behalf of General This or General That had given Radl his warrant, and to the end the generals were the scapegoat when anything went wrong.

With his bubbling good humour and a genius for squeezing out of dilemmas, Karl Radl was never at a loss; soon he was mapping the whole field of bureau-strategy and advancing on many sectors of the vital front. Before Radl joined him, all

Skorzeny's effort was being spent on this campaign of attrition; now he was able to devote quite half his time to considering the forgotten war against the Allies.

A later entrant in the commando field, Skorzeny made a start by asking Intelligence what his contemporaries had already done. He was sent over a vast dossier which had been painstakingly compiled and briskly put aside. The story began with the raids the British had launched on St. Nazaire, Dunkirk, Lofoten, and went on to describe the work of sea and desert raiders in the Mediterranean; it was documented with field reports and prisoners' statements.

The High Command had dismissed these operations as "pin-prick attacks" and "the work of amateurs", but the confidential reports made up a very different picture. As he read them Skorzeny felt his whole horizon change: this was what he had been waiting for—here was a touch of the sublime. A wider space for military imagination seemed to open before him. Projects of a kind he hardly dreamed of had been pioneered; and every step already taken offered new vistas. If Casablanca topped the charge of his explosive energies, the study of British methods lent them meaning and direction.

Skorzeny had established his commando school in a hunting lodge at Friedenthal (the Valley of Peace) not far from Berlin. It stood in a vast park amid wide acres of woodland and heath. Soon, barracks and hangars arose and there, while he worked on training programmes and the evolution of new methods, his mind kept constantly abreast with the successes—and failures—of the British.

One of the most fruitful reports to come into his hands told of the attempt to kidnap General Rommel in the Western Desert by commandos who appeared two hundred and fifty miles behind the lines by submarine; it was this which evoked Skorzeny's theory that battles may be half-won before they are fought by "carving out the brains" of the enemy. And the sombre result of this raid, based on faulty intelligence—for Rommel was on a trip to Rome at the time and in any case the wrong building was chosen for attack—convinced him that the only way of finding out what was happening was to go out and look.

In the meantime he came upon a profitable game to play—and

engaged the British as his unwitting partners. Being now in Intelligence, he knew that British planes which scurried night after night across the Continent were parachuting agents, radio sets, explosives and dangerous gadgets into the occupied countries. On a visit to Holland he found that most of the equipment and nearly half the agents had fallen into German hands. From the captives—some were double agents who did not mind which side paid their wages—he learned the British techniques of spying and wrecking which had been brought to a high pitch of excellence. He also used the codes of captured spies for radio messages in English ordering any piece of equipment that interested him; often it was dropped by the British next night. A noiseless revolver, for example—they had no such thing in Germany—was ordered by Skorzeny's Dutch "bureau" and punctually dropped; to test it he opened a window and shot a duck on the canal below—no one in the street turned his head.

Skorzeny was enchanted with the weapons which came in from England, and the ease with which he was able to steal the enemy's inventions. But when it came to copying them for his men, he ran into malevolently pig-headed objections.

For instance, a Sten-gun fitted with a silencer; to convince the experts he invited them to Friedenthal and took them walking while one of his men following ten or twelve yards behind fired off a clip. The experts heard nothing; when he showed them the shell-cases scattered on the ground, Skorzeny expected them to share his delight. On the contrary, the visitors were ruffled by the surprise he had arranged and could only pick holes in his proposal.

Ah well, thought Skorzeny, at least we can have the Sten without the silencer. He took the gun to the generals, full of its merits. Of course, he explained, it was not meant to be accurate at more than short range—it was a close-combat weapon; but it was foolproof; you could drop it in the mud, jump on it and then go on firing. The German tommy-guns they had were much dearer to make—and much more delicate.

No, said the generals. They could not copy it. Hitler had ordered that the German soldier must be equipped with weapons "of the finest quality in all respects". And all respects, they pointed out, included range.

That was the kind of answer that Skorzeny came up against for the rest of the time; with one hand, as it were, the High Command bade him create special forces for unprecedented tasks: with the other it withheld the means to do so. While Mountbatten and "Lucky" Laycock seemed to conjure up for their commandos superb weapons and fleets of planes and ships, the staff at Friedenthal had to fight for every cartridge belt. Supplies were tight all round: that was the pretext, but the huge appetite of regular formations was met with an unsparing largesse compared with the pinch-fist which doled out cheese-parings and candle-ends to their poor relations at Friedenthal.

One of the first missions Skorzeny took over was planned to cut the Middle East supply route to Russia. A German officer had been smuggled into Teheran, where he was intriguing with the Persians under British and Russian noses. The plot was thriving. Persian-speaking Germans had been parachuted to subvert the mountain tribes; more were following with the needful arms, then up would go the country like a powder barrel—or so they hoped.

A grandiose project: it was delayed at the start while Berlin's antique shops were ransacked for silver-handled pistols and inlaid fowling pieces (even Radl's buoyancy was not equal to indenting for gifts to tribal leaders), and it ended when the loan of a single long-range plane to drop reinforcements was refused.

The Persian fiasco was one of many ideas tossed into his lap without means to nurse them to fruition. Frost-bitten from the start, these frail seedlings must still be tended as if they would blossom in the end. And then Skorzeny found that he had not merely one set of masters to please; he had two. Besides the High Command, the politicians had a hand to play.

Magnitogorsk was an example of this. While still campaigning in Russia his interest had been caught by stories of Soviet war plants beyond the Urals; now with Intelligence reports he began to work on a plan for crippling part of this industrial complex in what is still today the most secret area on the globe. Thousands of Soviet prisoners were questioned; masses of air pictures were pieced together. At last two power plants were chosen as nerve-centres for the commando attack. Then someone told Heinrich

Himmler, Hitler's Minister of Interior and of much else, that the real place to go for in Russia was Magnitogorsk.

Magnitogorsk?—that was in the Urals too. Next day Skorzeny had a message from Berlin: orders to destroy the Magnitogorsk blast-furnaces (on which he had no information at all). As soon as could be, he would let Himmler know when the attack would be launched.

Impossible. That was the reply Skorzeny sat down to write; no one would let him send it. Karl Radl objected with cheerful guile that it would be fatal to anger Himmler, if only because his help might be useful one day on the main front against the General Staff. Finally, sleek young Lt.-Colonel Walther Schellenberg took over Skorzeny's education.

Schellenberg was a Himmler creation; in no time he had shot up to be Chief of Political Information in Berlin; now he imparted a secret of success:

"The more absurd the idea put up to you by a really important person, the more rapturously you should welcome it. Showy preparations should be started forthwith; assurances must be incessantly given that plans are advancing apace. Then gradually, drop by drop, the notion that certain outside factors may defer the glorious consummation may be allowed to seep through; until the author of the project finds himself wondering at his own earlier enthusiasm and begins discreetly to shelve the whole thing—if he hasn't forgotten all about it already."

It took eighteen months, applying the drop-by-drop technique, before Himmler's order was shelved. Nothing could be done about the perfectly practicable plan for blowing up the power plants until Magnitogorsk had been forgotten—and then the chance had gone.

Skorzeny had to contend against the popular belief that a commando attack was a glorified Red Indian raid, whooped up on the spur of the moment by a rabble of homicidal delinquents. In practice, success called for just the opposite approach—one of patient, tireless premeditation. He had to create a staff able to judge every tiny fact dug up by Intelligence. He had to create a supply section which could be trusted to anticipate all needs, from uniforms to driving licences, from explosives to matches, from food to special weapons. And he had to live at the centre of

this intricate machine while being able to detach his mind from its problems—for his was the leader's task of spotting the simple beyond the difficult.

Above everything else, as Skorzeny saw it, came the job of welding his fighting men into small, compact units; volunteers though they all were, each man had to be chosen singly for each mission and watched up to the moment he went into battle. He must know how to act entirely on his own, yet never forgetting his comrades' interests and the main purpose of their operation. If the smallest wheel of all this machinery slipped everything was imperilled, and even if they brought off the action it might be at a higher cost. "One for all and all for one" was no copybook maxim in Skorzeny's command, but a rule of life and a condition of survival.

He spent four months at Friedenthal, nursing the cold headquarters into life, bringing his troops to fighting pitch, making his own mistakes in his own way. Only four months, but in that time he had attained imaginative heights and breathed the mountain air. Nothing had happened that the world could see and nothing had warned him of the coming phase: that as the days of July ran out he would be one of six chosen from all the armed forces of his country to be scrutinised and appraised by Hitler himself.

CHAPTER IV

> The Führer . . . kept Dönitz and Student back to discuss the liberation of Mussolini. I hope this job won't be put on my plate. I can see no good in it.
>
> GENERAL ROMMEL, *The Rommel Papers*

UNTIL that Sunday in July when Mussolini's arrest became known, Skorzeny had never set eyes on Hitler—nor did he expect to, unless perhaps as one of thousands in a parade. The summons, when it came, seemed as absurdly unreal as an order from Olympus. Not only could he scarcely believe it possible; he almost missed it altogether.

He had lunched with a don from Vienna whom he had met in the Eden Hotel in Berlin. Free from uniform for a few hours, they were gossiping over *ersatz* coffee; the day was theirs, yet Skorzeny unaccountably felt uneasy. He telephoned Friedenthal to ask if anything was happening.

Anything happening? For nearly two hours they had been searching all Berlin for him. He was wanted at Hitler's Headquarters. A special plane was waiting at Templehof airport. It must take off at five—with Skorzeny in it. No, they had no idea what it was all about.

Hitler's Headquarters? Skorzeny said: "Tell Radl to meet me at the airport with my uniform." When the taxi reached Templehof, Karl Radl was there. He gave Skorzeny the warfront bulletins and said there had been some change in the Government of Italy; he could not say what it amounted to. The plane's engines were ticking over. While Skorzeny changed, he hurriedly promised Radl he would telephone as soon as he could. Meanwhile, he said, stand the men to; they might be wanted.

In a deep armchair in the plane, Skorzeny settled down, the solitary passenger. The whole affair was mad—some brass-hat extravaganza, some ludicrous mix-up. He saw in front of him as

they took off a built-in rack of liqueurs: French brandy, too—he poured a glass. Otto Skorzeny, with a V.I.P. plane all to himself.

He found a map in his brief-case—Radl, who thought of everything, had put it in—and decided to follow their route. Here was a chance to pinpoint Hitler's fabled headquarters: he had often wondered where they were hidden. For the world, the Wolf's Lair, as the headquarters were called, lay "somewhere on the Eastern Front"—a romantic public was permitted to suppose that the Leader shared the hazards and discomfort of his troops. The plane's route took them to East Prussia; over plain and stream they flew to Rastenburg, then in the gathering dusk touched down on an airstrip. A Mercédès was waiting. The headquarters turned out to be no front-line dug-out but a sizeable village in a forest; hidden from the air by camouflage nets and trees; protected by anti-aircraft guns, bunker defences, masses of barbed wire and hundreds of guards.

Skorzeny was greeted by an aide-de-camp who led him at once to a comfortable ante-room. There he was introduced to five officers, all senior to him; they too had been summoned without explanation from all parts of Europe. It was a long wait; Skorzeny grew impatient—what could it all be about? When one of the other officers mispronounced his name he found himself snapping, "It's not so very difficult. All you have to do is break it up: Skor- zay- ny—it's quite simple!" At that moment, when he was feeling foolish and on edge, the aide-de-camp returned. "Gentlemen, you will now enter the Leader's presence."

Hitler himself would see them! No one had bargained for that. They filed like schoolboys into another building; after a moment's delay the Headmaster walked briskly in. Hitler wore a tunic without badges, and an Iron Cross. Skorzeny, lined up with his companions, saw that they saluted their Commander-in-Chief with Prussian *empressement*; all that he could manage for this supreme moment was an awkward bow.

Hitler stopped before each of the six men he had sent for; he looked into their eyes in turn as each man briefly recited an outline of his career. Then he stepped back to put a question. "Which of you knows Italy—and what do you think of the Italians?"

One by one, the other five offered hopeful replies: the Italians

were their gallant allies, Rome was Germany's Axis partner, and so on. Skorzeny, last in the line, thought hard.

He knew that Hitler, like himself, must resent the loss of the Alto Adige, Austria's loveliest Alpine region, and yet for policy reasons had been obliged to let Italy have it. How could he touch this hidden spring without presumption? It was his turn: he said: "Leader, I am an Austrian."

Hitler stared at him with an unblinking gaze, but Skorzeny added nothing. Then he said shortly, "Captain Skorzeny, you will stay behind. The rest may go."

They were alone, and he heard Hitler say, "I have a mission of the highest importance for you"—but what this mission was did not immediately appear. Instead, there was a long preamble: Hitler, in tones of rising anger, said his partner Mussolini had just been betrayed and arrested. Italy lay wide open to invasion and at any moment Rome might fall to the Allies. The King of Italy had plotted this treason with the King's friend, Marshal Badoglio; now they meant to go over to the Allies and take Mussolini with them as a prisoner.

"I cannot and will not leave Mussolini to this fate," exclaimed Hitler loudly at this point. "He has got to be rescued before these traitors can surrender him to the enemy."

While Skorzeny was flattered at receiving the confidence of his Commander-in-Chief, he could not help wondering what all this had to do with him. In these quietly spoken words the answer came: "You, Skorzeny, are going to save my friend."

He listened in a daze as Hitler went on to warn him of the need for utmost secrecy. Only five or six other men should know of his decision that Mussolini must be rescued—no matter whose feelings might be hurt. One already informed was General Student, chief of Airborne troops, under whose command Skorzeny would act. Neither the General Staff in Italy nor the Rome Embassy must be told anything about it; they could not be trusted to keep quiet. No one knew where the prisoner had been taken, so that Skorzeny would not only have to rescue him; he would first have to find out where he was.

Fixed in the hypnotic stare, Skorzeny was not asked for an opinion. "You will avoid no risk," Hitler concluded. "You will succeed—and your success will have a tremendous effect

on the course of the war. This is a mission for which you will be answerable to me personally!"

With which equivocal farewell, and a double handclasp, Hitler sent him off. He turned at the door; the eyes were still on him.

Back in the ante-room, Skorzeny had just taken out a badly needed cigarette, when the aide-de-camp came to lead him to his new chief, Student. He found the general, jovial, pot-bellied, scarred across the brow by a bullet at Rotterdam: hardly had they met when in walked the S.S. Grand-Master Heinrich Himmler. Skorzeny cast about for yet another pretext to delay the Magnitogorsk raid, but Himmler had not come to talk of blast-furnaces; instead he wanted to brief them on the immediate task.

He began by repeating that nobody in Germany—or in Rome either—had any idea where the "turncoat" Italian Government had hidden Mussolini, but they suspected secret talks were already going on for transferring him to an Allied prison—where he would serve as a scapegoat for Italy.

Now for people who might help in the search—and he began to rattle off names: scores of Italian politicians and noblemen still said to favour Germany; some were trustworthy, some not. Skorzeny started to make notes, but Himmler stopped him with a shout and glared through his prim, silver *pince-nez*. "Put that pen away at once. Can't you use your memory? All this is absolutely secret!"

After half an hour of this "briefing" Skorzeny excused himself and went to a telephone box to call Radl. As he waited for his line to Friedenthal he lit the long-awaited cigarette. At once Himmler's thin face was peering through the glass door. "So you can't live without smoking," he snapped. "A fine choice for an important job, I must say!" The suspicion that Skorzeny had escaped for a cigarette in the midst of his disquisition was too much for the chief of all Hitler's secret police.

Radl's excited voice came through. Skorzeny told him to be ready to take off first thing next day, with fifty of his best men, including those who spoke Italian. They would fly to the south of France and from there to another destination which they would be told of on the way.

"Equipment? Bring everything," he said. "I'll send you a teleprinted list of extras when I have a moment. You will need tropical uniforms and mufti for a start."

Midnight found Skorzeny sending over the ticker to Friedenthal list after list of items—portable radios, grenades, tracer bullets, first-aid sets, machine-guns . . . He asked for coffee and continued. Everything might hang on a detail: Italian currency; priests' robes as a possible disguise—and then they would need black hair-dye and false papers.

At three a.m., his head spinning with names and half-formed plans, he found a bed and tried to sleep. He had no idea what he would do with the paraphernalia he had ordered, even supposing that Radl could raise half of it in the time; he did not know how he could find and rescue Hitler's friend. All he knew was that something was happening which would lift him right out of the trough of mediocrity—if he succeeded.

After breakfast he set off for Italy with General Student in a plane flown by the ace flier Capt. Gerlach, whom Student had made his personal pilot. They took a new route over the Alps to avoid Allied planes—an unpleasant reminder of the enemy's air ascendancy—and on the way they looked down on Skorzeny's native city of Vienna. Since he was passing as an A.D.C. to the General, he wore a fur-lined air force suit; arrived in the heat of Rome, he sweltered in it over his army uniform, yet he had to keep it on until he could find something suitable. This was a foretaste of what he must often suffer in the future, when to avoid attention he had to borrow uniforms which were either too thick or too thin for the climate and always too small, because nothing could be found to match his bulk.

Rome looked peaceful enough; and by evening he had been crammed into a paratroop officer's tropical mess kit to pay a social call. He drove with Student up the cool heights of Frascati; here, at the German headquarters on the Alban hills, they dined with Field-Marshal Kesselring. It appeared absurd that the Commander-in-Chief in Italy should have been kept in the dark about the Mussolini rescue project, but presently Skorzeny guessed why. Kesselring's upbringing in an outmoded school of chivalry made him seem out of place in an arena filled with Machiavellian

factions. He believed that every officer must naturally be a man of honour; when Skorzeny ventured to doubt the Italian generals' protestations that they had no idea where Mussolini was, his host brusquely corrected him.

Three days later the Friedenthal party arrived; eager for action, they were told there was nothing yet to do. Only Radl was let into the secret: his alert mind and quick eye were badly needed, for the whole enterprise was already enmeshed in a web of false clues and tangled theories.

Field-Marshal Kesselring still believed that in spite of Mussolini's overthrow and the Allies' successful landing in Sicily, he could keep Italy fighting on Germany's side. Hitler was sceptical, but wished to avoid an armed clash which would drive Italy into the Allied camp at a time when German forces in the peninsula were heavily outnumbered; he also hoped that an apparent acceptance of Italian assurances might help him to trace Mussolini. The façade of friendship likewise suited the King of Italy and the new Government of Marshal Badoglio; having Mussolini safely in the bag they could secretly bargain for peace while pretending to the Germans that despite the change of government they meant to fight on beside them.

It was touch and go who would move first—the Italians to change partners or the Germans to occupy all the strong-points in Italy and imprison the Government as traitors to the Axis cause. Skorzeny saw that in this game of bluff and counter-bluff the fallen dictator was the vital piece.

For Hitler, the salvage of Mussolini promised a revival of Fascist military energy on his side, a second wind for his deflated prestige, and reassurance to all the other little Mussolinis of the satellite countries.

For the King and Badoglio, Mussolini's removal meant the final collapse of the Fascist power, and possession of his person was a trump card in their deal with the Allies; his guards were not to let him get away alive. Until the Allies plunged into Italy to protect them, Badoglio's Government were bent on temporising.

Temporising suited the Germans, too. They could quietly draft in troops on the pretext of bolstering Italy's defence; simultaneously they worked on a plan to carry off the entire Italian

Royal Family and Badoglio's Government when the showdown came. Skorzeny's part in this was to capture the Crown Prince Umberto from the Quirinal Palace. Much time was spent on such scheming, while both sides pretended they were still devoted friends.

For Skorzeny the political charade was an infuriating distraction from his first objective. Every day the scent was growing colder. Mussolini had been arrested on leaving the Palace, bustled into an ambulance and whisked away. After that—well, there were a hundred sequels, all different, since the Italians are profligate in their use of rumour.

It was not long before Skorzeny saw that Badoglio's Government were shrouding their secret in a cloud of plausibility. All kinds of inspired reports were going the rounds, freely attributed to generals, ambassadors and Vatican statesmen. Mussolini was in hospital; he had been flown to Portugal; he was still hidden away in Rome. Small wonder that, in Berlin, Himmler had sent for astrologers and clairvoyants.

After three weeks of maddening talk, a love-letter: that it was to a servant girl made it seem the more credible. A gendarme on the island of Ponza—where politicians who offended Mussolini used to be confined—had written to his girl on the mainland to say that Mussolini himself was imprisoned there. Careless chatter by an Italian lieutenant led the trail on from Ponza to the naval base of Spezia—his cruiser had taken the prisoner there.

"Board the warship and remove its captive!" Such were the baffling orders which came that night from Hitler's headquarters. Quite how a modern cruiser on a war footing could be taken by assault, was not indicated; luckily a liaison officer still in touch with the Italians established that Mussolini had been moved again: first to a village in Sardinia and thence to the fortified port of La Maddalena on a tiny island three miles off; he was held there in a house called the Villa Weber.

With a subaltern who spoke excellent Italian Skorzeny crossed over to Sardinia. To pass unnoticed, they had rigged themselves up as German sailors—for there was still a German liaison officer with three or four ratings in La Maddalena. Skorzeny asked his companion, Lt. Warger, to do the round of the waterside bars; if Warger insisted, in his cups, that Mussolini had

escaped or was dying—no matter which—some Italian would surely bet that he was not.

Somebody did. A market gardener who, as luck would have it, supplied the Villa Weber. Taking the now unsteady Warger by the arm, he led him to a spot from which the terrace of the Villa Weber could be viewed: on that very terrace the gardener had seen Mussolini walking that morning between his jailers.

Next day, by astute questioning, Warger made sure of Mussolini's presence—and of the number of troops who guarded both town and villa as if against a siege. Skorzeny saw that the defences would have to be attacked in strength. How were the Italian guns placed? He got a plane from Rome and the two flew over, taking pictures. A group of British fighters joined them—and before they had time to wonder whether the R.A.F. were in the secret too their plane was forced into the sea. There Skorzeny's quest almost ended: he broke three ribs and was knocked out. Hauled aboard a rubber raft, he came round in time to dive back into the plane just before it sank and to recover the camera with its films.

Half an hour later the Germans were picked off a cluster of rocks by an Italian anti-aircraft ship. Skorzeny had qualms when he faced the commander, since clearly the ship was protecting Mussolini's hiding-place. Luckily, the castaways were not too closely questioned and soon, wearing a pair of white shoes and shorts lent him by the crew, Skorzeny was ashore in Sardinia again.

So back to Frascati. Radl, having had word that Skorzeny's plane was lost in the sea, received him as if he were a ghost. And here another set of orders waited.

Mussolini was not, as they had supposed, on La Maddalena; he was on a tiny island off Elba and "Captain Skorzeny will indicate the earliest possible day on which an attack can be made".

This astonishing information had come from Admiral Canaris, and who could hope to argue down the head of the secret service? Skorzeny had clashed with him already; yet even if Canaris's version had been swallowed by Hitler himself he felt that he must challenge it, for he knew that he was right and Canaris wrong. He won over General Student and with him flew to Hitler's headquarters to put his case against the orders of the High Command.

It was a forbidding audience which had gathered in the Wolf's Lair to pass judgement on this upstart captain. By now the leading Nazis had been let into the secret of the search for Mussolini. They were grouped round a monumental fireplace. Ribbentrop was on Hitler's right; the two military top men Marshal Keitel and General Jodl, Chiefs of the High Command and Operations Staff, were beyond. Himmler was there, poker-faced as ever. Then Grand Admiral Dönitz and the impassive bulk of Marshal Göring. They sat brooding in leather armchairs.

Presented by Student, Skorzeny said what he had to say. After a stumbling start, he talked, as Austrians will, "from the heart". The notes he had compiled were forgotten as he told of his stubborn search. He was sure Mussolini was still in La Maddalena, he said; he showed facts to prove he could be nowhere else. When he came to the story of Warger's impersonation of a drunken sailor, and let out that the young man had never touched drink until in Sardinia he was ordered to do so, Göring broke the tension with a roar of laughter.

Skorzeny ended his story; it had taken more than half an hour. Everyone looked at Hitler. Presently he got up and shook hands with Skorzeny. "You are right," he exclaimed. "I withdraw my orders. As you propose, we will attack La Maddalena. How would you set about it?"

The others gathered round, murmuring agreement. With a pencilled map, Skorzeny found himself showing the heads of the armed forces the plan which Student had already passed.

It was to be an affair of momentous dash and energy. On the eve of the attack there would be a naval courtesy visit to La Maddalena: under cover of this a speed-boat flotilla would enter the harbour; its commander would even exchange protocol calls with the Italians. Next morning, while the speed-boats were still in harbour, a flotilla of mine-sweepers would briefly call at a neighbouring island; and as they sailed away from it they would veer sharply and run straight into La Maddalena with Skorzeny's commandos and the men of the Armed S.S. German anti-aircraft guns from the main island of Sardinia, and the ship's guns, would give unostentatious cover for a polite march through the streets, led by Skorzeny, which would bring them right up to the Villa Weber. The plan was based on Skorzeny's belief that if

Skorzeny's own sketchmap of the Gran Sasso operation
For success both ends of the funicular had to be simultaneously seized, the upper end (Bergstation) by the glider force led by Skorzeny, the lower (Talstation) by a force of paratroops.

Mussolini triumphantly escorted from his Campo Imperatore prison by his rescuers. Alongside, carrying raincoat, is his ex-gaoler, General Cueli.

After the liberation. The garrison subdued, men of the attacking force reassemble on the mountainside.

you march your men peaceably through a place, and show by your demeanour that trouble is the last thing you expect, or are thinking of, ten to one you will get away with it.

Hitler approved; everybody approved: it was agreed that all the units should come under Skorzeny's command. The young soldier's dream had come true; the great men of the land were benignly studying his own plan; the marshals and the admirals taking their cue.

But Hitler, as ever, had a last warning. "You must understand, Captain Skorzeny, that if you fail I may have to disown you, since Italy is still nominally our ally. I should have to say, for reasons of state, that you acted without orders—you misled the units supporting you by turning the commanders' heads; your foolhardy action was prompted by excessive zeal, by ambition even. And if you fail, you must not defend yourself against public repudiation."

Skorzeny nodded; there was nothing he could say. But a gaunt image crossed his mind; Rudolf Hess too, it had been whispered, was warned that he would be disowned as a madman if his flight to England failed to secure a separate peace.

But Hitler believed in speeding his soldiers into battle with *élan*. He lifted a hand to Skorzeny's shoulder. "You will succeed," he said.

Back in Rome, Radl heard of Hitler's threat and pulled a face: "Oh well, we can always share a padded cell in one of Himmler's special sanatoria."

The eve of D-day came. Skorzeny was in one of the six speedboats which entered the harbour dressed over-all. Radl would lead the mine-sweeper party. Everything was ready for tomorrow; it would go like clockwork, Skorzeny was assured: even the telephones to the mainland were all marked out to be cut.

He was still not happy. With Lieut. Warger, both in ratings' uniform, he went for a last prowl near the Villa Weber and fell in with a guard who was taking a parcel to a laundry. As a tried opening gambit, they asked whether Mussolini was not dead. The guard denied the rumour, the more warmly when they insisted it was true. "I have it from a doctor who witnessed the Duce's last moments," cried Warger in a wicked flash of inspiration. This was too much for the guard. "Dead?" he cried. "Of

course Mussolini is not dead! Why, I saw him myself this morning. I was one of his escort down to that white ambulance seaplane which took him off the island."

It was so: there had been an ambulance plane in the harbour and now it was gone. And suddenly Skorzeny realised that although the guards round the villa were as numerous as ever, the stiffening had gone out of them; they were lolling about. There was just time before zero hour to cancel everything; he had narrowly escaped the humiliation of storming a prison without a prisoner—and the penalty that went with failure.

Back once more in Rome, to find the game of let's pretend still going on. The Italians, bland and charming exponents of hanky-panky, were cleverest at it. Already an Armistice had secretly been signed in Sicily and now Badoglio had to spin out the time until the Allies landed in Italy.

The suspense was hard on the Italians, who held the capital. But the Germans, too, were playing with a caution worthy of the stakes: Mussolini, Rome, perhaps all Italy. Their troops were disposed on the hills outside the city. Who would move first?

Keeping doggedly to his search for Mussolini, Skorzeny was rewarded with a series of false trails and assignations, in this villa and that café, each requiring minute investigation. He longed for Friedenthal as the days went on. Suddenly he was galvanised by an intercepted code message to the Italian Ministry of Interior. It said: "Security measures around Gran Sasso completed." That was all, but it was signed "Cueli"—and Skorzeny's spies had told him that a General Cueli was the Ministry's official responsible for Mussolini's safety.

The Gran Sasso, if Mussolini were really there, would present a problem. It was the loftiest peak in the Apennines, and in this area, a hundred miles from Rome as the crow flies, the mountain groups and ranges towered up to ten thousand feet.

Where in this cloudland could you house a prisoner of state with a regiment to guard him? According to their pre-war maps, nowhere; but a winter-sports centre called the Hotel Campo Imperatore had recently been built on a crag six thousand feet up. A gaudy tourist leaflet was produced. While maddeningly vague about the site and building it did say that the hotel could be

reached only by funicular—and such a mountain railway was an easily broken link with the outer world: ideal for achieving quick isolation.

Agents soon found that roads to the Gran Sasso through the pine forests were blocked. Nobody knew what was happening in a wide area all around. Skorzeny decided that he and Radl would have to fly over and find out.

In a plane fitted with an automatic camera, they took off on September 8. Nothing went right; as they flew over the Gran Sasso they found the camera had jammed. So Skorzeny had to struggle with a hand camera, hanging head-first out of the rear gunner's turret in the freezing air while Radl, laughing uproariously, held his legs. In a second run over the spot Skorzeny insisted on reversing the rôles; he pulled Radl back into the plane with the laughter frozen on his lips.

They got their pictures: the hotel, square and massive as a blockhouse set on a spur, and beside it, a triangle of ground and the little upper station of the funicular.

More trouble on the way back; they had to skim the ground to avoid a swarm of American bombers and fighters which were dropping an avalanche of explosives on the German headquarters and barracks at Frascati. As luck would have it they landed just in time to dash over to their own quarters, which were in flames, and salvage a few things, but the photographic studio which would have made stereoscopic enlargements of the Gran Sasso pictures had been blown to bits.

Rome was in uproar; the air-raid was in celebration of an Allied radio announcement that Italy had surrendered. That night the Allies landed at Salerno. The game of make-believe was over. Italy had changed sides—officially. Scattered fighting between Germans and Italians had already begun. Now that pretences were at an end, Mussolini could hardly be rescued without a battle; but at least, as Radl pointed out, the threat of Himmler's padded cell was removed. The show-down had come, and any brusque action against the Italians would not be fraught with diplomatic perils. They could go ahead.

Skorzeny had seen the Campo Imperatore from the air; independent checking now seemed to clinch the issue of Mussolini's presence there. A day or two earlier, Skorzeny had suggested to a

German army doctor that if he wanted to requisition an Alpine hotel for a convalescent home he knew just the place—it was on the Gran Sasso mountain. The doctor had set off right away; now he returned dejected. The Armistice, he supposed, had put paid to the idea anyway, but Skorzeny might as well know that he had sent him on a fool's errand. He had not been able to get within miles of the hotel; the whole area was sealed up. He must have run into at least a battalion of carabinieri, and another two hundred and fifty were said to be billeted in the hotel itself. He had telephoned from a village and asked for the manager: a short-tempered Italian officer had sent him to the devil.

This looked really hopeful; and then Skorzeny got a report that trade unionists were complaining about the injustice of expelling the hotel's civilian staff at a moment's notice, "simply to accommodate that Fascist Mussolini". That was it, then: the Gran Sasso was the place.

Looking at it all from the Italians' point of view, Skorzeny conceded they could be proud of themselves. Even if Mussolini's whereabouts became known his prison was obviously impregnable. Merely to surround the mountain and ensure that Mussolini was not moved out would need a full German division; huge losses would have to be taken among those jagged peaks: long before the Germans reached the prisoner—if they ever did—he could be hidden in some rocky cave or killed.

The Italians could sit back; their defences were impassable. They had overlooked nothing; nothing, that is, except an individual's determination to get through.

Skorzeny had his facts, such as they were, and his photographs, such as *they* were—holiday snaps four inches square—on which to base a plan of attack. If an orthodox land assault were ruled out, there was only the sky left, and the altitude had even ruled that out: paratroops plummeting through the thin air would be dashed to pieces; planes had nowhere to land; gliders——

He looked again at his pictures, at that triangular patch by the hotel. If it were really flat and smooth, a few gliders might land there. In that event shock troops might just reach Mussolini before his guards put a bullet in him; they could rush him to the funicular—the lower end having been seized by paratroops at exactly the same moment—and away. Skorzeny calculated

that with everything going perfectly they should reach Mussolini within three minutes of the shock attack. Time to get away? That must be left to luck.

Student raised a scarred eyebrow when Skorzeny put the scheme to him; both men were weary after three almost sleepless nights of crisis and the general was in no mood for hair-brained escapades. He sent for two technical officers of the Airborne staff, and Skorzeny had to expound the scheme again in detail as plausibly as he could.

The staff officers were not to be beguiled; experts never are. A glance at his snapshots told them that the proposed landing space was ridiculously small; nor had gliders ever come down in such rarefied air. They estimated that of a hundred men who made the trip twenty might survive—twenty men to storm a fortress defended by two hundred and fifty!

Skorzeny argued; the experts would not budge. At last he offered to drop the plan if they could put forward a better one. Student looked anxious; unless they were to abandon the mission given them by Hitler, there was no alternative in sight—and no time to look for one. Finally he yielded: but it would need three days, he said, to get the gliders from the south of France. Ninety of the men must be drawn from his trained airborne battalion; the rest Skorzeny could supply. D-day would be on September 12, with a seven-a.m. take-off.

That night Skorzeny called his men together and told them that he was going to lead a group of them on a dangerous and difficult operation ordered personally by Hitler.

"Candidly," he said, "the experts don't give much for our chances. They expect us to lose most of our strength even before the fighting starts. I hope it won't be as bad as all that, but losses are bound to be high. No one is ordered to take part. Anybody who wants to think twice about coming, or who has a family to worry about, can drop out now. He will have nothing to fear. His refusal will not be known outside our ranks nor put into any record, and we shall respect him no less."

Skorzeny might have spared his pains. Every man stepped forward and he had trouble persuading them that only eighteen could be picked. The remaining hours before D-day hurried by as they tried to catch up with a thousand details: direction of

approach, position of gliders *en route* and in landing, distances, altitudes, timing.

Skorzeny and Radl spent the last evening together with their soldiers. They drank a bottle of champagne to their chances and agreed on the principle that life was diverting and it was a shame to leave it.

Skorzeny summed up. "There are some things you can't work out with a slide-rule. That's just where our experts may be wrong; and the Italians too. The safer the enemy feel, the better our chances of catching them unawares. Well, we'll soon know."

Just after the paratroops left that night for the drop into the valley, Allied radio put out an announcement: Mussolini had been handed over by the Italians; an Italian battleship had brought him to North Africa.

For a moment Skorzeny could not get his breath. Then he remembered where the Italian capital ships had been stationed; it could not have been done in time. The broadcast must be a hoax to throw the Germans off Mussolini's trail. Italian brains were still at work.

CHAPTER V

> Tales of escape and rescue—dramatic, romantic, sometimes fantastic—are to be found in the history of every epoch and of every people; but my escape from the Gran Sasso prison appears even today as the boldest, the most romantic of all, and at the same time the most modern in method and style.
>
> BENITO MUSSOLINI, *Storia di un Anno*

IT was bright and windless, that September morning which the knot of men waiting at the airfield knew must be the last for quite a few of them. Great banks of white cloud lying athwart their north-easterly course might help to get them on their way unhindered; and the still, transparent morning would have softened the trials of their landing—if only they could have taken off as planned.

The start had been set for dawn—when they might hope to float down unperceived by a sleepy enemy—but the gliders were held up on their journey from the Riviera; they could not arrive before eleven a.m. at the earliest.

That meant, by Student's reckoning, twenty-four hours' delay—but there were not twenty-four hours to spare. They would simply have to accept the further risk of approaching in daylight and, moreover, at an hour when they would be the sport of warm air currents which might whisk the gliders from their path like so many paper darts.

Certainly, Skorzeny thought, since nobody in his senses would expect a glider operation at high noon, an added measure of surprise, if they lived to exploit it, might be achieved. So he went cheerfully among his men, distributing boxes of fresh fruit that he had bought to lend a picnic touch to the expedition. They were to take off at exactly one p.m., which would give them a landing time of about two o'clock.

The delay allowed Radl to follow a fancy of his own; he hur-

ried into Rome, where uneasy truce still reigned, and returned with an otherwise unimportant Italian, General Soletti, who had shown much favour to the Germans. Soletti was told his help was needed in "an important enterprise", it being Radl's hope that the sight of an Italian among the attackers might help to upset the garrison on the Gran Sasso.

The expedition, twelve gliders with their towing planes, was to be led to the dropping zone by the pilot who had taken Skorzeny and Radl on their numbing reconnaissance flight. Ten men in the first two gliders would cover the landing of the third with Skorzeny and Warger aboard; Radl was to follow in a fourth.

By half-past twelve the aircraft were drawn up, ready for the men to board them—and at that instant the sirens wailed. By the time they were all in shelter, Allied bombs were bursting all over the place—one of those jests of Providence as cruel as the rainstorm which wrecks the family outing. Yet when the all-clear sounded, Skorzeny found his gliders were untouched; the damage, as far as their interest went, was confined to craters on the runway.

Skorzeny followed his men into his glider and pulled Soletti after him into the front seat. With this extra passenger between his knees he signalled: the armada began to leave.

They took off dead on time. Skorzeny did not know till later that two machines behind him ran into bomb-holes and never left the ground. What he did see, once they had emerged from the bank of white cloud and had risen to twelve thousand feet, was that his two leading gliders had vanished. They had lost their guide, and also the covering party. So much the worse; since they would soon be approaching the Gran Sasso area Skorzeny would have to tax his memory of the photographic trip to lead the way in. But wedged in his seat he could not see where he was going.

He pulled out a knife and began to hack at the canvas deck and bulkheads. As they gave way, he blessed the flimsy fabric. Cool air rushed into the overheated shell, crammed as it was with men and weapons, and, peering through the rents, he could see the granite mountains below.

The Gran Sasso came into view. Soon they were a-top of it:

there was the hotel again, and on that dizzy perch alongside, the triangular ledge on which they would alight.

"Let go!" he told the pilot. The tow-rope parted and they were swooping freely, with no sound but the gush of the wind on their wings. Then the pilot was jabbing with his finger at the triangle below while he turned his goggled face towards Skorzeny. By no flight of hyperbole could the space be called a landing-field: it was a sloping shelf, for all the world like a ski-jump; and as they lost more height they saw it to be studded with outcrop rock.

General Student had provided against such a contingency. At a final briefing he had categorically laid down that unless they could make a smooth landing they must abandon the attack and glide to safety in the valley. Those were his unquestioned orders; in a spasm of defiance Skorzeny elected to disobey. He shouted to the pilot: "Dive—crash-land! As near the hotel as you can."

They hurtled towards the mountain, the parachute brake whipping from their tail. In another instant the glider was jolting and pitching over the boulders like a dinghy flung upon a reef. A shuddering crash, then it was still.

He was alive, was Skorzeny's first thought; his second: *three minutes.*

He burst out of the wrecked glider; before him, like a cliff-face twenty yards ahead, was the wall of the hotel. An Italian carabinier was standing there, rooted to the spot; he was stupefied by this apparition which had fallen almost at his feet out of the silent sky.

Skorzeny plunged past him to the first doorway: inside was a signalman tapping at a transmitter. a kick sent the chair from under him; Skorzeny's gun smashed the radio. But the room led nowhere.

Out again and full-tilt round a corner; he heard his men pounding behind him. A ten-foot terrace—they hoisted him up to it. From there, at an upper window, he spotted an unmistakeable shorn head. "Get back!" he yelled to Mussolini. "Get back from the window." And dashed off round the terrace.

At last: the main entrance, flanked by two sentry posts. The guards wore a look of wild amazement; before they could get their

breath, Skorzeny's men had booted their machine-guns off the supports and scrambled through the door. A voice far behind was shouting in Italian; Soletti was adding to the confusion.

Skorzeny butted his way through a press of soldiers in the lobby; they were at too-close quarters to shoot, even had they known what had come on them. He took a flight of stairs, turned a corner and flung open a door. The first thing he saw—Mussolini, with two Italian officers.

One of Skorzeny's brawniest subalterns, Lieut. Schwerdt, panted into the room after him. And just then two shining faces bobbed through the window: a couple of his men had swarmed up the lightning conductor to be with him. They overcame the Italian officers and dragged them from the room. Schwerdt took over as Mussolini's bodyguard.

From the window Skorzeny saw how other friends were faring. Radl was in sight, bounding towards the hotel; his glider had made a tolerable landing. Skorzeny hailed him with a shout: "We've got him here. All well so far. You look after the ground floor for me."

Three more gliders crash-landed, and men poured out. A fourth, landing some distance away, was smashed to pieces—no one moved from the wreckage. He could not hope for much more strength, so he turned back across the room, threw open the door and shouted in his bad Italian: "I want the commander. He must come at once." Some bewildered shouting—an Italian colonel appeared.

"I ask your immediate surrender," Skorzeny said in French. "Mussolini is already in our hands. We hold the building. If you want to avert senseless bloodshed you have sixty seconds to go and reflect."

Before the anxious minute was up the colonel came back. This time he carried a goblet brimming with red wine. "To a gallant victor," he bowed. Skorzeny thanked him and drained the beaker —he was thirsty. Cheers arose from the Germans below as a white sheet was flung from the window.

And now Skorzeny could spare time for Mussolini, who had been put into a corner of the room and there shielded by the bulk of Lieut. Schwerdt. He came forward: a stocky man looking older than his portraits showed him, in a blue suit that was too

large. He wore a stubble of beard; his pate sprouted grey bristle. But his eyes were black, ardent and excited.

It was a moment for history—the thought crossed Skorzeny's mind. He spoke in German: "Duce, I have been sent by the Leader to set you free." And Mussolini, who always considered his public, replied for posterity: "I knew my friend Adolf Hitler would not abandon me. I embrace my liberator."

Skorzeny went to see to the disarming of the Italian garrison and discovered he had captured an important personage from Rome—none other than the General Cueli who was responsible for keeping Mussolini sealed up and shut away. Having, through his intercepted code message, unwittingly put Skorzeny on the scent leading to the Gran Sasso, he was further unfortunate in choosing this day for a visit to his charge. Skorzeny was delighted to see him.

But now for a more urgent matter: the get-away. Both ends of the funicular were in German hands; a telephone call from the valley station said the paratroops had carried out their part. Since Mussolini could never hope to reach Rome by road once the alarm was given, it had been arranged that paratroopers should capture the nearby airfield at Aquila and hold it briefly while Mussolini was taken off by three Heinkel planes. But now Skorzeny's luckless radio operator could not get through to signal the rescue planes to set out from Rome. The alternative plan worked out in advance called for a single light aircraft to land in the valley: this had been done, but in coming down its landing gear was damaged. There remained a third, desperate choice: Captain Gerlach, Student's personal pilot, might try to land a tiny Stork spotter plane alongside the hotel itself and pick up Mussolini from the mountain ledge—an operation so hair-raising that Skorzeny and Radl had put it to General Student as the most theoretical of possibilities.

Now it was their only hope.

Skorzeny glanced heavenwards, and there, sure enough, the Stork was circling. Well, there was nothing for it. It had been said that Gerlach could do miracles in the air—let him perform one now.

Skorzeny got his troops, helped by some prisoners, to move the biggest boulders from a strip of the landing ledge and at a signal

Gerlach came delicately down on it. Gerlach was ready for anything until he heard what was actually wanted. Then he recoiled. To weigh down his frail craft with the united loads, each in its own right substantial, of Mussolini and Skorzeny! It was mad: he refused point-blank to consider it.

Skorzeny took him aside. He told how Hitler had personally commanded him, Skorzeny, to deliver Mussolini: now Gerlach had in his hands the only means through which that mission could be fulfilled; if he should stand aloof he would be defying Hitler's wishes. And what would there be left to them to do if they failed the Leader? Blow their brains out; that was all.

At last Gerlach gave in: "Have it your own way. If it's neck or nothing anyway we had better be on the move."

Squads hurriedly set to work again on the strip; even Mussolini lent a hand in rolling one or two boulders.

They squashed into the plane; Mussolini behind the pilot, Skorzeny behind Mussolini. With the engine turning, twelve men clung to the Stork, digging their heels in for a tug-of-war. Gerlach held a hand aloft until the engine's pitch rose in a crescendo; as he dropped his hand the men let go and the plane catapulted across the scree.

Skorzeny grasped the steel spars on either side of him, throwing his weight from side to side against the swaying motion as one wheel or the other was lifted by a rock. Suddenly a crevasse yawned before them; the plane shot over it and continued its career beyond, with the port wheel buckled. Then it went hurtling over the edge of the ravine.

In the group of Germans standing on the Gran Sasso, there was suddenly a gap. Radl had collapsed; he had fainted.

Gerlach brought off his miracle. With consummate skill he lifted the Stork gently from its nose-dive to flatten out a few hundred feet above the valley floor.

The rest seemed smooth sailing; even the glissade at Rome on starboard and rear wheels. And there, immaculate on the dusty airfield, forewarned by that instinct for an Occasion that animates aides-de-camp and diplomatic vice-marshals, there waited General Student's A.D.C., standing stiffly at the salute while the three crumpled figures stepped on to friendly soil.

It might not be friendly very long. There was fighting near by and no time for ceremony. So Skorzeny helped Mussolini into a transport plane and soon they were flying through bumpy weather in the Alps.

Few are privileged, at ten thousand feet in a wind-tossed plane, to be the confidants of a Man of Destiny; Skorzeny would gladly have foregone the honour as he strained to follow his companion's account of betrayals, imprisonments, and wanderings from jail to jail. Mussolini went on shouting in German over the roar of engines and the storm that beat upon them; he was still intoxicated by the melodrama.

They put down in Vienna. Even in war time the Imperial Hotel does not welcome with open arms visitors who arrive unshaven, unkempt and without luggage. However, the rooms had been booked by the Government and as the two guests, shabby as they looked, arrived in an important flurry of "security" towards midnight, the management had to put the best face on their displeasure. Then the telephone calls began.

Mussolini had gone straight upstairs. "I don't need anything at all," he said. "Not even pyjamas. I'm going to bed." But there was to be no sleep for his deliverer.

Skorzeny had scarcely gained his room when the first call came—from Berlin. It was Himmler! He reached for an ash-tray.

The Grand Master conveyed his stilted felicitations. Then, with an effort at solicitude, he suggested that since Skorzeny was in Vienna, he should have his gracious lady at the hotel with him until he went with Mussolini to be presented.

Presented? Why, of course, to Hitler.

While Skorzeny was calling his wife a full colonel was ushered in. He wore the regalia of the Knight's Cross, and now in the centre of the carpet he clicked his heels, bowed, and taking off the decoration hung it around Skorzeny's neck.

"Orders of the Leader," he explained: for the first time this high award had been conferred on the very day that it was earned. It was the Colonel's own Cross that he was giving him.

Skorzeny's wife entered. Hardly had they met when the telephone jangled once more. This time the hotel operator was beside himself: Adolf Hitler on the line from the Wolf's Lair.

Hitler was in a transport of delight. "Major Skorzeny," he

burst out, thus festively announcing his protégé's instant preferment. "Major Skorzeny, you are a man after my own heart. You have gained the day and crowned our mission with success. Your Leader thanks you!"

Marshal Göring took the telephone from Hitler. Keitel and others of the great were also clamouring to speak to him. Vienna radio had spread the news; the capital was in a ferment—all Europe was roused from sleep.

CHAPTER VI

> Let us rejoice with all our hearts. . . . I now have the feeling that our lucky streak has set in again. . . . The liberation of the Duce has caused a great sensation at home and abroad. . . . Even upon the enemy the effect of this melodramatic deliverance is enormous. Friend and foe alike are full of admiration. . . . There has hardly been a military event during the entire war that has so deeply stirred the emotions. . . . We are able to celebrate a first-class moral victory.
>
> *Goebbels' Diaries*, September 1943

It must not be allowed to happen too often. That seems to have been the unspoken agreement of the High Command when their world of prudent calculation was rocked by a storm of triumph which almost blew them off their feet.

The Gran Sasso exploit shone out, a *coup de théâtre*, against the dark backcloth of Germany's misfortunes. That the stroke should have been carried through by an outsider in brazen defiance of the rules was bad enough; but what was almost too much to be borne was the opportunity it gave to that other outsider, the Stage Director, to step into the limelight and regild his own prestige.

One cannot but feel for the High Command. Long had they suffered Hitler's caprices; now, just when his famous intuition had become a byword, so that there might at last be some chance of sound judgement—*their* judgement—taking over again, the wildest chance of all had outrageously succeeded.

The Leader was in his seventh heaven—quite insupportable. He danced at the news as he had danced only after the fall of France. The romantic had always drawn him; he respected the bizarre: to one of his incurable Wagnerianism the whole affair was pure intoxication. What other tyrant, he must have asked, would risk the mockery of the world to save a bankrupt

friend—or send forth an unknown champion on so crucial an errand?

So when Skorzeny arrived at the Wolf's Lair, which a few weeks before he had approached with such trepidation, he was received like a conquering hero. Pictures show a cock-a-whoop Hitler clasping Skorzeny's hand while the generals dutifully applaud. Medals rained down on him.

Mussolini—shaved, refreshed and full of plans for a comeback—bestowed on his rescuer the Order of the Hundred Musketeers, of which there might be only as many members. Marshal Göring made an adroitly-timed entrance, by special train, to present the Gold Medal of the Air Force. At the Sports Palace in Berlin a few days later Skorzeny was starred in a patriotic rally and there, in his turn, he pinned awards for gallantry on other soldiers.

Invitations poured in. Lunch with Martin Bormann, Hitler's deputy. Tea with Foreign Minister Ribbentrop. Dinner with Dr. Goebbels—he was becoming a drawing-room lion. But when the Propaganda Minister told him venomous anecdotes about other Cabinet Ministers there could be no vestigial doubt—he had arrived.

At midnight he was privileged to join the intimate circle of those to whom Hitler opened his heart at each day's end. The Leader sipped an amber fluid from a glass balanced on a silver saucer. A servant whispered in Skorzeny's ear: "If you don't really like tea at this hour—I can always get you coffee." But although Hitler made much of him, discoursing on his plans to embellish the Austrian city of Linz when the war was won and saying that he must return often for such talks, Skorzeny went to no more tea-parties at the Wolf's Lair.

A more ambitious man might have turned this season of delirium to any account he liked. But Skorzeny quickly tired of the dash and glitter of Hitler's court and the heavily curtained atmosphere of sycophancy which surrounded him. Above all, he was sickened by vainglorious accounts of the Gran Sasso action; Allied reports were just and generous enough. If anything made up for all the fuss it was the thousands of letters from men on every front saying that his success had put new heart into them.

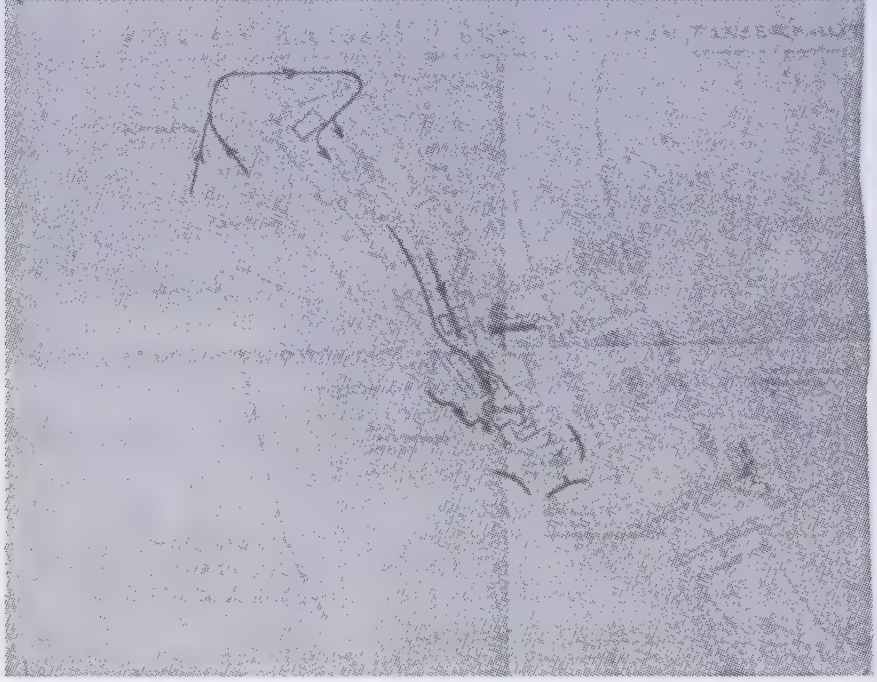
One task which Hitler imposed before letting him leave head-

ación especial

iberación de Mussolini

The front page of Signal, *the German High Command's wartime propaganda magazine celebrates the rescue.*
Signal *was published in full colour and in twenty languages for sale throughout the world.*

Happy landing. Mussolini is congratulated by his host on arrival at the Wolf's Lair airport.



Skorzeny's plan of action in Budapest
It shows the winding route up to Castle Hill taken by converging detachments from the town. The plan was to drive through the Vienna Gate (Wienertor), and then split into two columns which would join forces at the castle. Other German troops would make harrying attacks from the further sides of the hill to distract the defenders.

Horthy's palace, viewed from the Danube
The steep terraced gardens commanding the river were sown with machine guns. Skorzeny's column made their dash from the further (north west) side of Castle Hill.

quarters was delicate. He had to give an audience of tight-lipped generals a lecture on the techniques of commando attack as exemplified by Mussolini's rescue. It seems their peace of mind was disturbed by what he said, because next morning the Chief of Security took him on an inspection tour: he wanted to be sure that in case the enemy thought of making a similar attempt to reach Hitler there would be no gaps in their defences. Skorzeny pointed out two or three weak points: the officer went blue when cheerfully assured that, whatever he did, a determined and ingenious enemy would always find a way in.

It was obvious by now that the generals were willing to accept Skorzeny on their own terms, just as they accepted the "Commandos", with nothing of the commando spirit. But if there could be no common ground between them, at least his hour of glory put him on easy terms with people he had known only through the enlarging lens of propaganda. If on approach their stature shrank; if public men turned out to have but little interest in the public weal, while senior officers showed a blank incomprehension of realities—he would know better how to deal with them in future.

There was a tangible sequel to his Mussolini rescue which made up for everything: Hitler said he should raise a battalion of special troops for every front. Under the Leader's eye General Jodl beamed agreement. Where would Skorzeny find the men? Why, said Jodl, he could straight away enlist four thousand from the Brandenburg Division: wonderful material there, excellent stuff.

Skorzeny needed no second invitation: he had enjoyed a foretaste of the Brandenburgers' quality in the person of Adrian Freiherr von Foelkersam, who with some other officers from that division had asked for a transfer to the commandos. Born in Riga, he was the scion of a Baltic German house—his grandfather fought as an admiral in the Czar's navy against the Japanese. At twenty-nine he spoke fluent Russian, French and English; he had studied economics at Berlin and Vienna universities and was a tireless worker.

Like many others eager to take the craziest risks if they could use their heads in doing so, von Foelkersam had joined the Brandenburg unit when it was created in 1939 as a hush-hush battalion

in which foreign-language speakers and specialist volunteers might enrol. In the first few months they were used on work of secrecy and danger; then as the battalion grew, first to a regiment and then to a division, the generals began to employ it on every-day front-line work. Thus Germany's young men of brains and background, the men who had travelled abroad and spoke Western languages, were being squandered in routine battles in the Balkans or on the Eastern front.

That was why von Foelkersam had crossed over with his friends to the commandos; arrived at Friedenthal, the gifts which made him Skorzeny's chief-of-staff unhappily robbed him of many chances to be in the forefront of action. "Adrian was a Junker, but in the best sense of that discredited word—otherwise," Skorzeny baldly explains, "we should not have got on at all. He regarded duty and leadership as the privileges of a noble name."

By 1943 complaints about using the Brandenburg division as cannon-fodder, and defections such as von Foelkersam's, had soured the temper of the High Command. What to do with all this unmilitary versatility in the mass? Then came Skorzeny, and they were doubtless glad of the chance to dump the problem child into his lap. Luckily it took to him at once.

Back at Friedenthal—a "valley of peace" indeed after the brouha of Berlin and the Wolf's Lair—vigorous training began. Skorzeny wanted the moon: each of his commandos should be a parachutist, a swimmer, a linguist, a saboteur; he would be able to drive—and repair—anything from a steam-roller to a locomotive; and so on. Soon enough, he realised that he would have to cut his coat according to his cloth, and there was precious little time for tailoring. Snapshots, hundreds of them, taken at Friedenthal, show Skorzeny in the happiest camaraderie with his men; the officers can be picked out by their careworn look. "Naturally!" said Skorzeny, when challenged with this. "I worked my poor young officers to death."

Armed S.S. had told him to put in for all the equipment he needed. An exhaustive list was sent; for weeks there was no response. When the letter came Skorzeny tore it open: all their requirements were approved! But, ran the last sentence, since Major Skorzeny now exercised the powers of a divisional com-

mander, he could not look to the Armed S.S. for these supplies; he must become independent.

Radl roared at the mad logic of the headquarters mind: then quickly became practical. Why, this letter was a licence to plunder every arsenal and supply depot in Europe! So, at least, they could use it; and desperate situations needed desperate measures.

Skorzeny grimly agreed. Such was the start of his career as a bandit. He abstracted weapons and left promissory notes. He borrowed stores with no intention of returning them; Radl joyfully involved himself in streams of applications for supplies he had already taken or quoted non-existent permits for requisitioning more.

They started by stealing equipment, and went on to steal men. The Gran Sasso had lit a beacon at Friedenthal for the adventurous. Since Skorzeny's command included elements of all three Services he was besieged by volunteers not only from the Army, but from the Navy and Air Force too. They came thronging to his new flag: the fire-eaters, the knights-errant and the ne'er-do-wells, all ready to march up to the cannon's mouth instantly—if only they could wangle a transfer to Friedenthal. Skorzeny and Radl began to "rustle" men as border raiders lift cattle; once in sanctuary at Friedenthal, the toughest malcontents from other units became docile, trembling at a word lest it should rob them of their chance. Radl eluded the pursuit; his eager lip-service to regulations bemused all who were not hobbled from the start by festoons of red tape.

This period of recruiting and training was further enlivened by two calls from the Wolf's Lair. Hitler's mind was still running on prestidigitation, for he asked Skorzeny to snatch him two more international figures—and everything was made ready to do so.

First victim was to be Marshal Pétain, the Vichy Head of State who had sat on the fence so long between Germany and the Allies that nobody was sure what he would do next. Hitler had been inflamed by alarming—if contradictory—reports from his spies. One group said the old man was preparing to spirit his Government off to North Africa, there to throw in his lot with the Allies. A second warned that Pétain's London rival, General de Gaulle, was about to do him some mischief because he meant to help Germany after all. Hitler ordered that whatever it was all

about—and it is amusing to find that the Germans were just as badly stumped by the Vichy riddle as were the Allies—Skorzeny was to be ready to whip the chief actors from the stage.

He went with von Foelkersam to Paris; there he would get his orders. They called hopefully at the Hotel Continental in the Rue de Rivoli and found it swarming with German staff officers, who knew very little; then at the Champs-Élysées bureaux of the all-seeing S.S. Police, who knew still less. So with sanction from the Wolf's Lair they collected a few thousand troops and police for whatever lay ahead. The force was headed by a general—Skorzeny was a major. When they got word at last to go on to Vichy, the general solved the problem of precedence on the outskirts of Pétain's capital; he vanished into an *auberge* renowned for its cooking and did not emerge again.

Skorzeny had been told he must quietly surround the town so as to be able to block all highways in and out of it. On getting the signal "The wolf howls", he should move into the town and seize the Government.

He made his dispositions: a double cordon laid lightly around Vichy, but not close enough to put Pétain on his guard; and an assault force which would reach the Government offices in ten minutes. With von Foelkersam he strolled through the unsuspecting spa, enjoying the disguise of mufti and discussing over coffee and *croissants* how the troops would dash across the formal gardens and then, by seizing a covered bridge which linked two hotels, occupy the main buildings before French troops were alarmed.

The plan was based on first-hand observation—and particularly on the discovery that Vichy had the siesta habit. Skorzeny determined—when the Wolf howled—that he would march peaceably into the town at two in the afternoon when everybody was asleep; he also impressed on his little assault force that there was to be no shooting without orders, even if the French garrison fired first. Then he waited. He waited a month: at midnight he was called to Paris and connected by telephone with Hitler's headquarters. Orders at last: "Return to Vichy and stand by." Finally, just in time for Christmas leave, he was told to pack up and send his men back to their units; the only dash they made was to board the Paris express. Pétain was left to pursue his enigmatic

course, quite unaware of the travel plans that Skorzeny had prepared for him.

"Get Marshal Tito—alive or dead!" That was the next challenge tossed to Skorzeny. He snapped it up with relish. The guerilla chief had beaten off repeated offensives and his ragged partisans were pinning down forces badly needed on other fronts. The High Command were willing to have this Jugoslav thorn pulled from their flesh by anyone—even Skorzeny.

He flew to Belgrade: where was Tito? Five different intelligence reports put the marshal in five different mountain areas. Days of head-splitting argument followed. It was clear only that a war of blood-thirsty reprisals was laced with Balkan politics which Skorzeny found more obscure than Vichy's, more entangled than anything in Rome. As well as Tito's communists, the Germans were still supposed to be fighting General Mihailovitch's royalists, while motley forces of Serb Chetniks and Croatian Ustachi changed sides and positions in a confused mêlée. Italian garrisons, marooned since Badoglio's surrender, had laid down arms, which were joyfully seized by their several enemies. What really mattered was the swelling threat of Tito with his one hundred thousand "full-time" guerillas who held wide tracts already and could strike everywhere else. Tito was the key, and now that the British were arranging for massive air drops, the Germans must make an end of Tito—at once.

Skorzeny knew he would never make sure of anything in this hot-bed of rumour, so with two N.C.O.s he left the capital for Agram, in the heart of Tito's territory. Driving in his Mercédès through country which had seen no German car for months, he knew that half the workers in the fields were ready to put down the spade for the rifle at a moment's notice, and he had to gamble on passing before the moment was up. They reached an isolated outpost on the mountains at Fruska Gora; at lunch the German commander told spine-tingling tales of ambuscades ahead. Even their village doctor was honorary surgeon to the Partisans, he said, and honorary surgeon to the Germans as well. When at last they got to Agram no one there would believe they had motored from Belgrade.

It took four weeks to trace Tito. He was in Western Bosnia at Dvar with a British Military Mission. His secret headquarters

were in a cliff-side cave which overlooked the town—and all approaches.

Skorzeny intended to pounce with men disguised as Partisans and he sent von Foelkersam to inform the German general in nominal command of the Dvar area. The general was extremely chilly. The reason came out a day or two later; a Jugoslav agent of Skorzeny's said the general had his own plans for storming Tito's base—and in the next few days this was advertised by planes which reconnoitred Dvar.

Skorzeny radioed the general that as his own agents knew about the impending operation it was likely the Partisans had wind of it too; and if Tito got away this time, he would not be easy to approach again. Skorzeny was willing to put himself under the general's orders—they could work together.

But the general would not be stayed. He acted as if Skorzeny was a rival. To a task calling for the scalpel, he brought a sledge-hammer—full-scale airborne invasion of the Dvar Valley with bombers, paratroops and gliders. The hammer missed, of course. All the Germans captured was an empty uniform stitched with gold stars. The marshal had moved on, but his Partisans stayed behind to give as good as they got: German infantry had to battle through the mountains to rescue the general's survivors.

When next heard of, Tito was away in the island of Vis, off the Adriatic coast of Jugoslavia. Skorzeny wanted to make a swoop across the straits, but by then he was up to the ears in other enterprises.

"Secret Weapons," for instance, which sounded so esoteric but were often simple improvisations, came into his sphere. In the underwater world the individual was still king: a solitary man could slip under the guard of thousands in armour-plated ships, could pass through nets and minefields and radar screens to make his kill. It called for nerve that transcended anything Skorzeny had met in land warfare.

Midget submarines were still in their teething stage in Germany, so Skorzeny was glad to learn from Italian experience of underwater raids on Gibraltar and Alexandria, where the battle line of the British Mediterranean fleet had been put out of action at a critical time by attacks on the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* in harbour. After Italy's collapse her famous small-boat leader

Prince Valerio Borghese joined Mussolini's new Government in the North with his entire unit. He worked closely with Skorzeny on developing new devices such as the explosives-packed speed-boat which ejects its pilot just before it strikes.

If the German Navy was penned into port by Allied might as the war went on, many sailors were not. The best of them tumbled into a force of sea commandos headed by Admiral Heye who enjoyed studying "secret weapons" with Skorzeny. The Nigger was one of the most effective results of their collaboration. To construct a Nigger you simply scooped the charge out of a torpedo, fitted controls with a glass cupola for a pilot, and slung a second (live) torpedo underneath it. The pilot would unleash the live torpedo as he swerved away from the target—and from the explosion which followed. Twenty Niggers went out against the Allied bridgehead fleet at Anzio, south of Rome: fourteen pilots reported back to Skorzeny. For the loss of six men they had damaged a cruiser, sunk a second warship and crippled or sent to the bottom six thousand tons of merchant shipping.

Soon Niggers were out in the Channel as well as in the Mediterranean. The enemy came to know them, so empty glass cupolas were floated out; then, when all the Allied guns were firing in one direction, the real Niggers would attack from the other. These were essentially surprise weapons: crude, primitive, but the more effective in being the invention of a moment, since they could be replaced or adapted as soon as their secret was out.

D-day in France loomed near. Studying air-pictures of English ports, Skorzeny racked his brains over unfamiliar shapes—and never guessed they were pieces of jigsaws which, assembled off Normandy, would become prefabricated harbours. He was shrewder in his estimate of the landing-places: those the Allies chose were among the ten he had decided on after a scrutiny of naval charts. He planned his own "reception party" and moved heaven and earth for approval of the scheme. Sea commandos would greet the Allies with new devices, planes would set off, by radio, explosives buried under the beaches—there were all manner of ingenious ideas which might throw an invader off his balance at a critical moment. When the verdict arrived Skorzeny found that he had banged his head against the unchanging fortress of Headquarters.

His plan, on which everyone at Friedenthal had worked double hours, was commended in warmest terms: it redounded to their credit; it was deserving of all praise. "But," said the Western Front Command in Paris, "*since the Leader has said the Atlantic Wall is invulnerable, and since the preparations Major Skorzeny proposes might suggest to the troops witnessing them that there are some doubts about this question after all, the scheme cannot be approved, either in whole or part.*"

The landings were met by regular forces in well-regulated array. Hard pounding followed; the Allies pounded the harder. In a few weeks the crust was broken: Paris was open—and at Friedenthal they tried to swallow their misgivings about the war. The German generals, they argued, might still have something up their sleeves, some special surprise. . . .

And so some of them had.

CHAPTER VII

In the dictionary of the soldier the terms "treason" and "Plot against the State" do not exist. This is the worst dilemma a soldier can be faced with.

GENERAL HALDER, before the Nuremberg Tribunal.

Let dog eat dog.—WINSTON CHURCHILL.

I agree that the Allies unfortunately discounted the German plots against Hitler. This was true both in your country and my own.

ALLEN W. DULLES, head of American Intelligence, in a letter to the author, May 1953.

THE events of July 20, 1944—that day of infamy in the Nazi calendar—are treasured in Skorzeny's mind as a classic of confusion. But for the fact of his own, accidental, rôle in it he might be inclined to fancy that the whole affair in all its chaotic detail had been staged by some master hand. He still feels, looking back on it, rather like a man who strayed into some Wild West film depicting a gambling den when the stakes are high—and the lights are suddenly shot out.

At noon on that day, which was six weeks after the Allies got ashore in Normandy, a group of high staff officers, utterly quiet, were waiting for news in the War Office—and it was not news from the front. They stood in the room of General Olbricht, Chief of Staff, Home Forces, like souls expecting Judgement. They had ears only for the telephone: its ring next minute, in an hour, in two hours, might be the signal for revolution.

Half-past twelve—the bomb must have been planted by now, surely. One o'clock: nothing mattered but that telephone. Two . . two-thirty.

At half-past three it rang. "Who? What? He's dead!"

It had happened at last. It had come off. The men in the room knew just what to do. "Plan Valkyrie!" ordered General Olbricht.

The others jumped to it—exultant in their relief. Within seconds the code-name "Valkyrie" went flashing round Europe from Berlin. In Paris, Vienna, Munich, Brussels, at every H.Q. in every country, envelopes were being slit, sealed orders to be opened only when the signal came were being read.

"Valkyrie" ordained the round-up by the Army of all the Party chiefs, starting with Dr. Goebbels, Berlin's boss; and the seizure of the capital by Home Forces. It meant the transfer of power to a surrender Government and the ending of the war at once.

The men who had waited for the telephone set about their work with triumphant confidence. There was much to be done—for was not Hitler dead?

"Hitler dead?" The frightened question was being whispered in the capital that afternoon. Skorzeny was there and heard it, but he set little store by Berlin rumours. He was busy getting off to Vienna, where there was an interesting new job; and he was looking forward to being home again, especially in mid-summer when Austria would be at its best. With Karl Radl, he settled down in a reserved carriage; they were in high spirits as the train rattled into the suburbs.

"Major Skorzeny, Major Skorzeny!" They had pulled up at the last stop before leaving Berlin—and there his name was being called. A panting subaltern came up to the window. Orders to come back at once. He was wanted at Armed S.S. Headquarters. It was true—someone had tried to kill Hitler.

Still incredulous, Skorzeny let Radl go on alone, promising to join him by the next train. As they drove back to Berlin, the breathless messenger told him that Hitler had been wounded by assassins. Armoured units were moving on the capital. Conflicting orders were coming from all over the place. No one knew who was in charge. The Army and the S.S. might come to blows. . . .

At S.S. Intelligence Headquarters they came upon the first picture of panic. A group of uniformed clerks surged round the entrance: someone had put machine-pistols into their hands and told them to bar the way. Skorzeny herded the clerks down to a basement. They must learn to handle weapons before they carried them, he said—and locked them up.

Upstairs he found who had issued the guns: young Walther

Schellenberg, his mentor of the drop-by-drop technique. By clinging to Himmler's sleeve Schellenberg had become Intelligence Chief, a post of dignity and power he would gladly have relinquished until this crisis was over. In the black and silver trappings of an S.S. brigadier, he sat at his desk behind a loaded revolver. "If they come for me I am ready," he burst out. "I shall defend myself; you can be sure of that."

Skorzeny asked what he knew. It was little enough; all they were sure of was that Hitler's death had been proclaimed—and then it had been denied. The announcement came from the Home Forces Headquarters in the War Office; the denial from the High Command at Hitler's headquarters. There were rumours of clashes in Berlin; of marches and counter-marches. How could one know what to believe?

Not, thought Skorzeny, by waiting behind a desk for "them" to come. First he telephoned von Foelkersam to alert all their units and to hurry over with a company of troops to guard the S.S. Intelligence building. Then he went out into the streets to see what he could discover.

He drove down the Wilhelmstrasse—it looked as lifeless as any other Government quarter, in peace or war, after five p.m. Schellenberg had babbled something about armour moving up against the Ministries; he decided to take the bull by the horns and go up to Armoured G.H.Q.; but on turning in that direction he found the avenue leading to it was barred by tanks. Whose side were they on? Did they know themselves? Skorzeny drew himself up in the moving car to suggest that their side was his side and that his presence was expected. The tankmen saluted and let him pass: he was in.

Quickly he made his way to the office of General Bolbrinker, the commanding officer, but Bolbrinker, too, was completely at a loss. He had been told by the War Office to bring his armoured units right into Berlin—right, he had done it; then he had been told to smoke out a mutiny at the barracks of the Armed S.S. —well, he was ready to do that too; but a signal from the High Command countermanded it. Really he supposed he should not take orders except through his own chief, General Guderian. But with Guderian away, what was he to do?

Skorzeny foresaw that even a reconnaissance group of tanks

sent over to the S.S. barracks while all Berlin was on tenterhooks might be enough to start the shooting. And soon it would be dark; that would add to the confusion. He had better try to soothe the ruffled Bolbrinker.

"Do nothing for the moment," he advised. "I've just come from S.S. Intelligence; no trouble there. If you like, I'll go over to their barracks now and let you know if I scent mutiny."

Bolbrinker accepted this idea with relief. Arrived at the barracks of the Armed S.S., Skorzeny found that no one had mutinied and no one had orders to intervene anywhere; so on the colonel's promise not to do anything hasty, he telephoned General Bolbrinker that he could keep his tanks at home.

What other units might have received inflammatory orders? Skorzeny's mind jumped to the Airborne troops—they, too, were based on the capital. He drove out to see them at their lakeside centre. All seemed quiet, yet if a call should come from the War Office, which seemed to be the origin of the mischief, there were enough paratrooping desperadoes under hot-headed young officers to rush out and set all Berlin by the ears. Their commander must be warned—but he was not to be found.

It was nine-thirty before Skorzeny tracked down General Student. The victor of Rotterdam and Crete, whose orders not to crash-land on the Gran Sasso he had disobeyed, knew nothing of the hubbub in Berlin. Sitting in his dressing-gown on the terrace of his house, he was tut-tutting over sheaves of office memoranda while his wife stitched at her embroidery: they made an idyll of suburban peace under a frilly reading-lamp.

Midway through his visitor's recital Student threw himself back in his wicker chair. "Plots and mutinies?" he cried. "My dear Skorzeny, you must be dreaming." The leader of Germany's most modern arm refused to believe anything so irregular could happen. Nor would he be bustled into signalling his detachments all over Europe to take orders only from himself: that was much too unusual. Only after long argument did the general give ground—and then the telephone rang.

It was Göring. The marshal was calling from the Wolf's Lair. Skorzeny could hear his voice rasping with excitement: "Plot to murder Hitler . . . War Office gone crazy . . . They're all up to the neck in it."

No one should accept orders from the Home Forces, Göring said; they were traitors; only the High Command should be obeyed. The airborne troops everywhere must be kept in. Calm, the marshal bellowed, was all-important—unless they wanted civil war.

Leaving a subdued Student to warn his battalions one by one, Skorzeny drove back to S.S. Intelligence Headquarters, where he found Schellenberg protected by the newly-arrived company of troops from Friedenthal. The sleek and slim brigadier looked more than ever like a ghost—for Himmler had just telephoned him orders to arrest Canaris. Admiral Canaris, the former head of Military Intelligence, to be arrested! Well, he would have to do it, of course, but not single-handed; Skorzeny must give him a bodyguard: an officer, and at least ten men—on second thoughts he would like a full platoon.

Since Canaris, however formidable his past, had fallen months ago from power and was now known to keep house guarded only by a swarm of dachshunds, Skorzeny suggested a single officer might be help enough to apprehend him; and Schellenberg, seeking strength in the feel of his revolver, went out into the night to bring Canaris back.

Now that was over, Skorzeny decided he could go on and join Karl Radl in Vienna. But no; Hitler's headquarters were on the telephone for him. He was to hurry over all the troops he had "to help Major Remer outside the War Office". It was the first order Skorzeny had been given since his recall to Berlin—and it would be the last.

Major Remer, it seemed, commanded the Greater Berlin Guard Battalion. He introduced himself at the entrance to the War Office when Skorzeny arrived, explaining that he had already cut off the whole group of buildings with his men.

Here was another topsy-turvy situation. A few hours earlier the major had been suddenly ordered by the War Office to occupy Hitler's Chancellery, as well as the chief Ministries, and to arrest the Party Leaders. At the Propaganda Ministry, however, Goebbels persuaded him to speak on a private line to the Wolf's Lair. Hitler himself came to the telephone—and then the fat was in the fire. Where had Remer got those orders from? Was his battalion ready to march? Then let him march it at once to the War Office and seal off that nest of traitors. So there he was.

While Skorzeny was standing outside the War Office there was a sudden flurry of salutes. No one to leave: then what of this dignitary who emerged from the gateway and got into his car? Skorzeny was told it was General Fromm, Home Army Commander-in-Chief; and he heard Fromm's parting words: "I shall be going home now; you can get me at my flat." With a crunch of tyres he was away. Skorzeny and Remer agreed that from now on no one, however exalted in rank, should be allowed to pass out.

Posting his troops inside the courtyard of the War Office, Skorzeny then marched upstairs with von Foelkersam and another of his officers. Their boots echoed from silent stone walls; all at once, on the second floor, they fell into an ambush. A group of staff officers sprang out on them, waving machine-pistols and demanding their business. Much relieved to know the intruders had come in peace, they burst into high-pitched explanation.

It seemed the curtain had just come down upon a scene of military fratricide that had left them shaking in their shoes. There had been murders, suicides and executions. The paroxysm was over now, they hoped; never had they known the like.

Skorzeny went from one room to another; in each his arrival startled a group with pistols in their unaccustomed hands. These were the dishevelled remnants of what Karl Radl had called "the main enemy": the dapper tribe in red-striped trousers who booby-trapped provincials like himself; the haughty clerks who refused supplies; the desk-bound feudatories no soldier dared offend. White-faced, they stared as if he were some dangerous djini from Arabia who would not be conjured back into his jar.

From room to room he went, from floor to floor. Telephones were ringing; no one picked them up. Message machines were ticking out their unread screeds. This had been going on for the most part of a day, and Skorzeny was shocked to see it. So often had he chafed because some order had not come through from the War Office: now that the whole monstrous honeycomb was hushed, the flow of supplies and reinforcements all over Europe must be coming to a standstill. Paralysis would begin to set in unless someone awoke the hive to life.

He went up to some officers he had met before; they admitted something should be done—but what, and by whom? The Com-

mander-in-Chief had gone off. Other senior officers had been victims of—well, of what had just happened. Nobody had been able to get Hitler's headquarters for hours; telephone lines to the High Command were jammed with calls.

Skorzeny broke into this flow of pretexts for nothing being done; he knew it could go on for ever. He suggested to the officers around him that they should set an example by going back to their desks—nothing so reassuring, after all, as doing the usual thing. They yielded to this appeal. Other officers, seeing them at work, joined in the march back to normality; soon they were sharply recalling their own subordinates to a sense of duty. With a rising hum, the hive began to buzz again.

And now Skorzeny could begin to piece together an outline of "what had just happened". Staff officers told him how they had been unwitting witnesses, if not accessories, of a day of historic betrayals—and of the months that had led up to it; they "simply had no idea" what was going on in their midst. Now, of course, the details hung together. It started in the War Office with that fellow von Stauffenberg . . .

Count von Stauffenberg was a new broom; to the chagrin of the career men he had been brought in a few months ago and at once made General Olbricht's right-hand man in the office of the Chief-of-Staff. Von Stauffenberg had risen to colonel in Rommel's desert campaigns; he had lost his right arm, two fingers of the left hand and the sight of one eye. Yet this was the agent—the one disabled man among them—whom the plotters had chosen to kill Hitler: he could not even fire a pistol; it had to be a bomb. Von Stauffenberg was made liaison man with the Wolf's Lair.

Just before Skorzeny had arrived at the War Office, they went on, Hitler himself had spoken on the radio to prove that he was not dead. Those who heard him said he fastened the plot on to "a small clique of traitors"; it had nothing to do with the Armed Forces. His listeners in the War Office knew better, for already it was clear to them that young von Stauffenberg had been manœuvred into his new post by Army confederates who knew it would give him the opportunity of taking his bomb to the Wolf's Lair.

All sorts of people, as it later appeared, were mixed up in the

July 20 plot, but its prime sponsors were a group of active and compulsorily retired officers. In corners of the Mess, in castles and country houses with their civilian accomplices, they discussed endlessly what they should do. How they talked, these generals. Some wanted to make sure the war could not be won before casting out the Nazi leaders; others would have welcomed defeat so as to be rid of them. Some would kill; others imprison the dictator. Some were for friendship with Moscow—most of them detested Russia more than they hated Hitler. If it had been left to the generals, then very likely nothing would have been done. It was purely by chance that they found in Colonel von Stauffenberg the one man who knew his own mind and would lose no time.

Once von Stauffenberg had been wangled into the War Office it was simply a matter of going on an official mission to the Wolf's Lair. On the morning of July 20 his chance came. . . . He left the dispatch case with a time-bomb under Hitler's conference table and walked out of the meeting under pretext of a telephone call. A few minutes later he saw the building blown sky high; it was his jubilant voice from the airport on his way back to the War Office that had set "Valkyrie" into effect.

Skorzeny got an officer to show him von Stauffenberg's room. His desk had already been broken open and the drawers ransacked, but one or two things had been overlooked. The first was a copy of Plan "Valkyrie"—its trumpet sound mocking Hitler's Wagnerian passion—which had been thrust into a file labelled "Scheme for defending Berlin from air attack": von Stauffenberg had been rightly confident that it would gather dust under this camouflage until he wanted it. The second find was a parlour game in which pawns representing armies moved across the map of Europe according to the throw of the dice—so this was how they killed time in the "higher echelons" of the War Office!

Skorzeny turned back to the "Valkyrie" file and was freshly amazed to read its instructions for seizing nerve-centres and rounding up Hitler's followers. For weeks copies of this candid document had been docketed in offices all over Europe in the form of orders which were not to be read until the code-word "Valkyrie" was received. Had a single copy been opened anywhere before

the proper time the whole conspiracy would have blown; but the plotters had counted—and not in vain—on strict compliance with the rules.

So then, it seemed, von Stauffenberg's telephone call had set the wheels of chaos moving. The "Valkyrie" signal flashed out from the War Office; revolution by rule at once began in Paris, Brussels and many German cities which were told Hitler was dead and an anti-Nazi Government had taken over. The key posts had been allocated in advance: General Ludwig Beck would head the new State; Field-Marshal von Witzleben would be Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces; and General Olbricht, who had sent out Hitler's executioner from the War Office, would be Minister for War.

In the War Office centre of the plot the one enigma for the conspirators was their Commander-in-Chief, General Fromm. Here was a cat which might jump either way. So after they had sent out the "Valkyrie" signal the conspirators, led by Beck and Olbricht, marched into Fromm's office. Hitler was dead, they told him; he could come out now into the open as one of the nation's saviours. But Fromm wanted to be sure. He picked up the telephone and asked for the Wolf's Lair. To the horror of the plotters he got through.

Once again a general had bungled. The communications chief at Hitler's headquarters, who was in the plot, had failed in his undertaking to blow up the signals centre, so that in a few minutes on the line to Göring, Fromm knew the truth. Hitler's luck had held: scarred, deafened, and scorched by the bomb which had killed or wounded twenty-four others, he was still capable of collecting his senses—and of getting his revenge.

Just as Fromm put down the telephone, von Stauffenberg burst into the War Office: "Hitler is dead—I killed him!" he shouted. "Hitler is alive—you are all under arrest," was General Fromm's retort. Then and there—since there was no going back now—the conspirators should have made an end of Fromm; instead, they locked him in an office while they tried to get one of their number, General Hoeppner, to take over as Commander-in-Chief. Hoeppner objected that he must have his instructions in writing. Written orders for a mutiny! Small wonder General Fromm was soon able, with the help of some of his cronies, to turn the tables

on the plotters: his jailers had overlooked that the room in which he had been put contained a telephone. Then the Commander-in-Chief started a counter-revolution of his own. He began a series of drum-head court-martials—and executions—to kill off the plotters before they implicated him. Thus he began the shootings which had so unnerved the War Office.

Terrified onlookers told Skorzeny how von Stauffenberg, with General Olbricht and another officer, had been taken out into the courtyard and held in the headlights of an armoured car before a shooting squad. Then there had been a volley of shots from the Commander-in-Chief's room: it was explained that General Beck had been offered the privilege of the pistol; failing twice to kill himself he had been given the *coup de grâce* on Fromm's orders. General Hoeppner was also offered a revolver; juridical to the last, he refused to act as his own judge and executioner.

During this private purge, Europe had been thrown into chaos for the second time in the day. Unending calls from the Wolf's Lair put Plan "Valkyrie" violently into reverse. Berlin received a torrent of signals; as the night drew on the War Office became more and more the target of Hitler's suspicions: it must be isolated, it must be cut off. General Fromm did not wait. Having polished off the men who might have blabbed, he washed his hands, locked his desk and went on his ambiguous way just in time for Skorzeny to see the last of him.

So now, the hive lacked its queen-bee. This brought hiatus: a staff-colonel told Skorzeny that a call for reinforcements to the Eastern front had just come in: they had the order ready, but there was no Commander-in-Chief to approve it. What could be done? "I'll sign for him," Skorzeny found himself replying: he was thinking of his comrades at the front. The colonel accepted the stranger's usurpation of authority. Presently there was a dispatch needing the initials of von Stauffenberg—his body lay under a tarpaulin in the courtyard below; then an erroneous message which only General Olbricht, who also was no more, could countermand.

There was still no way of getting through to the High Command. Who would answer for it if there were mistakes? Shutting his eyes to the chances of retribution, Skorzeny said he would. Since no one else was willing to shoulder responsibility in this

labyrinth of proper channels or to close the links in the chain of command, he would have to do so himself, and since there was nobody he could ask for emergency powers—well, he would have to take them. At least men and munitions would be kept moving; and for once, with expedition.

When, some hours later, he got through to the Wolf's Lair he was simply told to carry on; someone would eventually take over. All next day it was the same: whenever he spoke to the High Command they fobbed him off with promises. Orders still went out to the armies with no more weighty authority than his own.

Not until July 22 was Skorzeny relieved. Then in walked Heinrich Himmler. The trouble was all over, he said, but unfortunately General Fromm would not be returning to duty. He himself would take over as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. Hitler trusted nobody else.

When Skorzeny walked stiffly down the staircase of the War Office thirty-six hours after he had entered it, he felt a question moving somewhere at the back of his mind, but he was too tired to put a finger on it. He drove directly to Friedenthal and tumbled into bed. Ten hours later he awoke, and fell to pondering.

First, the unbelievable: for nearly two days a temporary soldier, and an interloper at that, had been in absolute control of the vast and complicated apparatus of the War Office. Nobody appointed him; he showed no credentials: it was just that a void had opened and he let himself be drawn into it. All the mummery of "Security" did not stop him from taking over the chair of the Commander-in-Chief, that uneasy chair which had already changed occupants twice in a day.

Now supposing, Skorzeny's thoughts ran on, that he had been secretly in league with the conspirators; or, for that matter, with an external power? What an occasion to play the devil with the machinery so that it would take weeks or months to put the pieces back again—always granting that such a breathing-space had been allowed by a remorseless, swiftly acting, *efficient* enemy.

And here Skorzeny marvelled over the inactivity of the Allies on July 20. It needed only an airborne landing to turn confusion into civil war. All the troops Hitler could count on were a garrison of three thousand, Bolbrinker's armoured training school,

Skorzeny's own two battalions at Friedenthal and a few dribs and drabs, apart from headquarters staffs whom he did not take into account.

But if the Allies were slow in reaching for their prize, and if the plotters threw up the sponge as soon as they were faced with a fight, July proved to Skorzeny's satisfaction how, in times of real disorder, almost anyone can get away with anything.

Nor was the effect on Hitler as skin-deep as his injuries. When next Skorzeny met him he had aged; he had to clasp his hands together to stop their trembling. More than ever he was given to jealous outbursts; had he not been assured up to the very moment the bomb exploded that no German general could ever betray his oath? Skorzeny was warned that the Leader would accept no advice that did not exalt his own prejudices; no reports that conflicted with his beliefs. Disproof was contumacy; argument was treason. Once the unity of the German officers corps had been split, Hitler saw traitors everywhere—at night he dreamed of them.

The attempt of July 20, to all appearances a failure, had sown unbearable suspicion in the victim's brain. And there can be no germ warfare more terrible than the disease of doubt.

CHAPTER VIII

> At last we are eye to eye with death. We must renounce all hope of freaks of fortune. Sacrifice to the last drop of blood is demanded of us. Surrender would paralyse and sap our race for generations.
>
> German Army's radio spokesman in a broadcast to German troops in the battle for Hungary, October 1944.

By the autumn of 1944 Europe was shaking under the march of Hitler's enemies; they had advanced to the Rhineland border and the threshold of East Prussia. Germany's cities lay in ruins; her industries were broken; to the horrors of the air by night were added new fleets of American bombers by day.

Which of the invaders would reach Berlin first? That was the only doubt; inevitably, all would be over before winter.

The turn of fortune that enabled Hitler to fight on into yet another year presents a lesson in a neglected field of study: the art of holding on to shaky allies; and in this affair, too, Skorzeny played a most unusual part.

On September 10 he was torn away from his work by a summons to the Wolf's Lair. General Jodl said he wanted him to attend a series of discussions on grand strategy: it would enlarge his outlook for a job Hitler had in store for him.

In spite of Skorzeny's impatience at such inactivity, it was time well spent. Germany's real plight came home to him. The Western scene looked black enough; on the Russian front the position was catastrophic. In the North Finland was gone, the Baltic states had crumpled. In the Centre the Russians had bounded four hundred miles in a month; the Wolf's Lair was an hour's drive now from guns. In the South the victors of Stalingrad had thrust the Germans back more than a thousand miles into the Balkans. Rumania, with her oil-fields, was already lost; Bulgaria would go

next; Tito's Partisans had joined hands with the Red Army in Jugoslavia.

This picture, which at close range struck awe into Skorzeny, did nothing to disturb High Command routine. Twice every day —no more, no less—an august assemblage stood at the long table in the map-room. Hitler alone had a stool, which he seldom used, and an array of coloured pencils, all freshly sharpened. Weary as he looked and sounded, his mind card-indexed every unit on the front: as each fresh gap appeared he would call on reserves or switch forces from one front to another. Since one reverse now followed on the next, disaster itself had become banal and must conform to rule. The generals' talk was all in terms of divisions and army corps, and hearing the names of some units he knew, Skorzeny's heart fell. He had seen them coming out of the line: infantry divisions wasted to battalion strength; armoured divisions with a dozen tanks left, and he knew they had not been repaired. But here at headquarters such matters were not spoken of. A division was a flag pinned into a situation map; so long as the flags were there all must be well—the Order of Battle was intact.

This, then, was the power-house of the greatest military machine the world had known. On July 20 he had seen it dislocated by a single jolt, and a short spell watching its workings explained why. Many of the master cogs did not engage at all: even the so-called High Command controlled only some areas of the battle-front; something called Army Operations Staff had usurped others. Air Force and Naval liaison chiefs made little connection with the military. No department was ever sure what another might be doing—and it would invite reprisals to inquire: enough that it had always been so.

When Hitler had gone off, leaving the situation map covered with angry whorls and arrows, the generals relaxed. Vermouth lit a companionable sparkle. There would be murmurs: "Not much to talk of, really!" "It's always much the same."

Nothing rippled the surface of this imbecile serenity except the Leader's frequent tantrums. Skorzeny remembers a day when his entrance was awaited with peculiar foreboding. He strode to his place and swept the coloured pencils to the floor: no maps would be marked today. Forthwith Jodl and Keitel were accused of trying to pull the wool over his eyes: in Poland—

what was going on? It came out that the underground army had risen and turned Warsaw into a battle-ground. None of the High Command had dared tell Hitler; all hoped the mess could be cleared up before he came upon it—now he had found them out! Skorzeny wished most heartily that he was back at Friedenthal.

At last, one evening, Hitler gave him a sign to stay on after briefing. With Keitel, Jodl, Ribbentrop and Himmler they settled in a group of armchairs. Ribbentrop had a hunted look—it was plain the Foreign Minister had been "sent for"; his cabal of puppet states and gimcrack kingdoms having collapsed, he was to serve as scapegoat for the impending scene.

Hitler started with a sarcastic curtain-lecture. He had news for them, he said: the generals' stupidity had at last been surpassed; his diplomats had gone one better. They had thrown his one remaining ally to the Russians; they had brought down his last bastion; they had probably lost him the war.

Ribbentrop sat pale and wordless through this philippic. Keitel and Jodl studied the ceiling. Only Himmler was unaffected. As others' fortunes waned, his star ascended: his features were arranged in a mask of woeful virtue.

Hitler rushed on. The last ally was Hungary. If Hungary went, Germany would fall—there were no two ways about it. Hungary was now almost his only source of oil, of grain, and of bauxite for the jet-plane programme. But economics were not all: Hungary's collapse would cut off seventy divisions from the main battle-front. Italy, Greece, all that was left of Occupied Europe, would be overrun within a week. The Red Army would pour across the Danube plains into Austria.

Skorzeny knew there was no line to fall back on even when Vienna was reached: from his home the Russians would fan out into Germany; the war must end in weeks.

And yet—he could not understand Hitler's extreme pessimism. Hungary did not seem in such urgent danger. Her armies were fighting stoutly in the Carpathians, and had a million Germans to help them. Together they held a mountain chain which had shielded Southern Europe for centuries. Why should Hungary fall?

Germany was being betrayed, Hitler went on to explain, by someone outside his reach. Admiral Horthy, the Hungarian

Regent, was a traitor to their cause. He had been trafficking with the enemy. First he went slyly to the British: they told him to try Moscow, since it was the Red Army his troops were facing. Now Hitler had learned that Horthy was about to throw open the road to Budapest—turn-table of all German communications in the south—the road to Vienna and Berlin.

Skorzeny's eyes went to the map of Southern Europe: an arc of flags—sixteen of them, each standing for a Russian army—was pinned beside the horse-shoe contours which formed Hungary's eastern border: that meant a total of a hundred and twenty enemy divisions along the Carpathians. If the dams which held them fell, a Russian tidal wave would burst over the Danubian plain: and the first to be engulfed would be the German troops, a million men for whom there could be no Dunkirk.

Hitler was addressing him directly: "You, Skorzeny, will deal with this Admiral Horthy."

The task he outlined was both formidable and delicate. Skorzeny must pluck Horthy's sting, but not so as to bring the hornets' nest about their ears. While the Hungarians at least acted friendship, Skorzeny would be able to go about the country and make his plans.

It began to sound like an echo of the Mussolini mission; except that this time, the climax would be reached not on some remote Alpine peak but in the heart of Budapest: at one stroke, Hitler said, the Regent in his Castle and his Government must be overturned. Admiral Horthy was ready for the worst—and in particular Skorzeny should know that, since the Gran Sasso affair, he had taken precautions against being kidnapped. No half-measures would do—the Castle would have to be taken by storm.

Then it was Jodl's turn to speak. Hitler had already mentioned the General Staff's ideas for an airborne attack: for this they would furnish a squadron of gliders, two paratroop battalions and a crack battalion made up of officer-cadets. Also Skorzeny would have for his own use a special plane of the Leader's Squadron—nothing was too good for him today.

Before hearing his master's steely adieu—"Mind, Skorzeny; I count on you!"—he was handed by Hitler a crackling sheet of notepaper. Surmounted by the German eagle and Iron Cross in gilt, it read:

"From the Leader and Chancellor of the State

"Major Skorzeny has been directly charged by myself with secret and personal orders of utmost importance. All personnel, military and civil, will assist Major Skorzeny by every means and will forward all his wishes.

"(*Signed*) ADOLF HITLER."

Here was trustingness itself: Hitler had put into his hands a lever which could be used to turn Germany upside down. Who dare question its authority or deny its bearer anything? Creators of war-time forgeries never produced anything so simple.

Skorzeny put the paper away. He did not enjoy exacting blind obedience; a nice use of friendly connections, he decided, would take him farther than this power to dragoon everyone and mobilise all the power of the State.

And then, he was humbled by the enormity of the task that had been thrust on him. Since Skorzeny's boyhood in Austria Admiral Horthy had ruled the eastern marches of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire as an heir to a revered tradition and a link with the Emperor Franz Joseph, whose reign had opened nearly a century before. Though the Regent did not yet wear the Iron Crown of Hungary, he was said to covet it. Already he could declare, like Louis XIV, "L'état c'est moi". How to pull down the man and leave the State entire?

And then, again, how could Horthy be reached? The Regent lived like some feudal monarch: attended by Ministers and guards, fenced in by troops, he had his being on the heights of Castle Hill which dominated all Budapest. Skorzeny, in his student days, and often later on, had toured those time-honoured ramparts. Now, without warning, he was asked to burst through them.

It was no swashbuckling commando who landed in Budapest a few days later. Instead, there stepped from the air liner a Dr. Wolf from Cologne, who drove past the hotels used by German officers on their way to the front, and took up his quarters in a private house.

Presently, guide-book in hand, he was enjoying the air on the

summit of Castle Hill—and confirming his memories of its granite strength. The walls enclosed a township of patrician houses, Embassies, Ministries and quarters for a garrison of thousands. The streets were full of troops; sentries and guns were well sited; and crowning all, from the magnificent palace which overhung the Danube, there flew the standard of the Hungarian Hapsburgs—the Regent was at home.

To make this personal tour of the Castle Hill was convenient, but it led to the gloomiest conclusions. An assault force would be butchered before it got half-way up. The use of siege artillery would only enrage the Hungarian armies at the front and turn them against the Germans—then the Russians would be through. At the Wolf's Lair they had suggested airborne troops—he found the only landing-space anywhere near was ringed by buildings: a broadside would be poured on them before they could cut free their parachutes. Skorzeny noted the name that Baedeker gave this space: "The Field of Blood."

Looking down towards the city which lay spread out below, Skorzeny decided his assault must be based on a clearer idea of Hungarian intentions: the first fortress to be entered was the Regent's mind.

Admiral Horthy was behaving strangely. This autocrat who had seized power from a Communist régime in 1919 and kept a tight hand on the country ever since—how could he think of selling out to Stalin? Hungary would be bolshevised anew: the Regent would surely be lucky to save his own neck if he let the Russians in.

The answer to this riddle emerged from a series of palavers in Budapest—each heavily attended, considering the secrecy which was supposed to cloak Skorzeny's mission. German diplomats from Castle Hill who had failed to keep Horthy's loyalty, German military and intelligence chiefs, Hungarian spies in German pay —all had their say in the confabulations.

The one thing everyone agreed on was that Horthy was under the influence of his son Nicholas, a play-boy in his thirties who was often seen in Budapest's cabarets, but was also active in the political manœuvres of the capital. Lately named successor to the Regency, Nicholas had been persuaded by Soviet go-betweens that the dynasty could survive within the Russian orbit. Other

rulers got similar assurances from Stalin at that time: President Beneš, King Michael of Rumania and Jugoslavia's King Peter among them.

Though Horthy had swallowed the Soviet bait, no one was supposed to know. Hungarians and Germans met daily in the town or up on Castle Hill, where Hitler's Embassy occupied a site of honour among the Government palaces: they dined and lunched and toasted the common cause. In Budapest the railway yards were noisy with German rolling-stock trundling up to the Carpathians, where Hitler's divisions were mixed with their gallant and devoted allies.

But behind this public friendship both sides plotted furiously. The Germans found out that Horthy's commander-in-chief at the front, General Miklos, had met Red Army leaders in the Carpathians; the fate of the million Germans out there was the bargaining-counter of their commerce. When all had been agreed, the news of peace would be broken to the Germans just as abruptly as the Italian Armistice was sprung on them the year before.

Skorzeny soon ascertained that the Hungarians were armed at all points against surprises. The decks were cleared for action on Castle Hill; new guns and mine-fields were being laid. That forlorn German outpost on the Hill, the Embassy, was unobtrusively surrounded.

From hour to hour news from the southern front grew worse. Thirty Rumanian and Bulgarian divisions which had been with Hitler turned round against him; if now the Hungarian armies changed sides too, the front would surely collapse. Something, however risky, must be done soon.

It was at this point that an agent who had wormed his way into Nicholas Horthy's circle reported a second set of surrender parleys going on in Budapest itself. Here the Soviet brief was held by a group of Jugoslavs—Marshal Tito then being Stalin's trusty —and that very evening the two sides were to meet in a villa outside the capital. Nicholas Horthy himself would be there. This was a chance to catch the "crown prince" red-handed: and then, confronted with the proofs of guilt, Admiral Horthy would surely give up his double game.

Skorzeny laid a cordon round the house: Nicholas's car drew

up at the appointed time. The Germans were about to swoop, when out of the car there stepped not only Nicholas but his father, too. Skorzeny had been told to avoid a head-on clash with the Regent: disgusted, he called off his men.

The meeting must have been fruitful, for at it a final conclave was fixed for the following Sunday, October 15, to initial the surrender pact. This time Nicholas would go alone, but with a large force of troops on call. And the rendezvous would be no isolated villa but a second-floor office on a square near the Danube.

The Germans made counter-plans. They found rooms to let on the top floor of the building; four agents moved in, with orders to break into the meeting five minutes after Nicholas arrived. At the same time other Germans from outside would dash upstairs to close the trap on the conspirators.

It was a sparkling autumn morning when the rival troupes prepared their entrances for a modern Hungarian *opéra bouffe*, with bullets instead of bouquets at the curtain's fall. Skorzeny drove up alone in his Dr. Wolf disguise. The square by the Danube wore an empty, Sunday look, but two Hungarian vehicles were parked outside the office building: a canvas-covered army lorry and a car Skorzeny recognised as Nicholas Horthy's. He drew up just ahead of them: then he got out, opened his car bonnet and began to fiddle with the engine. At that the canvas of the lorry was jerked back by an inquiring hand; Skorzeny saw three Hungarian officers inside, with a machine-gun. And two other Hungarian officers were strolling with excessive unconcern in the gardens of the square. The conference had started; Nicholas's guard was set.

Skorzeny had his friends, too, ready for their cues. His chauffeur and one of his N.C.O.s lounged on a park bench. And from the corner of the square two more of his confederates were coming on the scene: German military police who moved towards him with dawdling steps. They drew level with Skorzeny, exchanged a dramatic wink—and in a flash were darting up the stairs into the plotters' building.

The trap was sprung.

But the Hungarians had kept a sharp look-out. Before Skorzeny could move, fire came from the canvas-covered lorry; the second German policeman spun round on the threshold of the

building and rolled down the stone stairs to the pavement. Skorzeny dragged the man behind his car; at once machine-gun bullets began to play a tattoo on it.

The loiterers in the gardens hastened to join in. Firing from the hip the Hungarians dashed forward to join their brother officers in the covered truck; the park-bench loungers sprinted over to help Skorzeny. His chauffeur was hit in the thigh as he tumbled down beside him; all three Germans tried to get in a shot or two at the covered truck from behind Skorzeny's car. But pistols against machine-guns; a diversion was overdue. Skorzeny had hidden von Foelkersam with a company of men in a street not far away. While dodging bullets and trying to shoot back, he blew three blasts on a whistle and a minute later he heard the tread of his troops coming up at the run.

The Hungarians left the lorry and ran. But instead of seeking shelter in the plotters' house, they decamped into a neighbouring building. Skorzeny raised a wary head over his car. The second doorway was full of Hungarian troops: Nicholas Horthy had secreted his reserves next door—now they were coming out in force.

To get his blow in first, Skorzeny led a dash for the conspirators' house. As the Germans ran they lobbed grenades at the neighbouring portico: down came brickbats, blocks of concrete, shattered marble slabs, on the Hungarians in the doorway: the rest of them were penned up on the other side.

Crossing the threshold of the plotters' house, he ran into a group struggling downstairs: the German agents planted on the top floor had invaded the peace conclave and captured young Horthy with three others. Nicholas was flailing the air and shouting vengeance when Skorzeny saw him. A Persian rug lay across the hall; a curtain rope hung near by—in no time the "crown prince" was rolled up, trussed and slung into a lorry.

"To the airport," Skorzeny shouted. "I'll follow." He paused to tell von Foelkersam to move off his men—"and no more shooting"—before jumping into another car.

As he tried to catch up the lorry a hundred yards on, a company of Hungarian troops came towards them at the double; another company were behind and a third, all making for the square: the Regent's reinforcements—somehow they must be

delayed. He accosted the leading officer: "Halt! You must not go that way."

The Hungarian pulled up; his men stopped short behind him. "What's the matter?" he demanded. Skorzeny argued for a few minutes; then, guessing the square would by now be clear of German troops, drove off unchallenged. At the airport he saw a protesting roll of carpet being heaved on to a plane. With a roar of engines, Nicholas Horthy was on his way to Germany, a prisoner.

So far so good: at the cost of a few pawns a rook had been swept from the board. It remained to see how Admiral Horthy would take this reverse.

Skorzeny went over to the hotel which served as German Army Headquarters to await events. A telephone call from the German Embassy said Castle Hill was in a state of siege with all approaches barricaded and mined. Their military attaché had tried to drive down to the town and been turned back. In diplomatic jargon this was an "unfriendly act". Feinting was almost at an end.

Then the radio warned listeners to stand by for a declaration by the Regent. At two p.m. it came: a tirade against his German allies, ending: "It is clear today that Germany has lost the war . . . Hungary has accordingly concluded a preliminary armistice with Russia, and will cease all hostilities against her."

The Regent had called "Check". Anger at his son's kidnapping had precipitated this Armistice announcement: that was all to the good if it meant the Russians were unready yet to move into the Hungarian positions.

A German general raced up to the Carpathians to head off Horthy's commander-in-chief before he could go over to the enemy—too late; General Miklos with a few of his staff officers had already crossed the lines. But the Germans were pleasantly surprised to find the Hungarian armies reluctant to lay down their arms before receiving an official cease-fire. Radio statements, even by the Regent, did not rank as "orders".

In their confusion the Hungarian War Office had not sent out the agreed signals—all the more reason, said Skorzeny, for striking now at Castle Hill: if they were quick the tables might be turned once more. But how could the attack be carried out? Brute force had advocates, chief of them an S.S. brigadier called

Bach-Zelewski, renowned as a professional tough. Bach-Zelewski had carted to Hungary a twenty-five-inch mortar which had been used to smash a way into the Black Sea citadel of Sebastopol; in the recent fighting it had razed much of Warsaw too. All Bach-Zelewski asked for was a free hand and he would reduce the Castle to powder. Skorzeny stood firm: Hitler wanted Hungary to be won back—not blasted into Stalin's arms.

The other Germans were undecided. Bach-Zelewski might wish to go too far, but what else could be done? If Skorzeny ruled out the General Staff's airborne landing; if, as was obvious, an infantry assault must fail, what did he suggest? He knew the odds: against the three Hungarian divisions in the Budapest area, the Germans had less than one division. Even the élite troops Jodl had lent for the attack would be outmatched by Horthy's bodyguard of nearly two thousand on the Hill. What chance would the Germans have?

The chance, Skorzeny replied, of the side which is so much the weaker that others may drop their guard. He would employ all the forces available, but not in the expected way. The German division, or what there was of it, was gradually surrounding the Hill as if a leisurely siege was intended. At dawn the attack would start. Forays would be made on the perimeter by two battalions to distract and mislead Horthy. Meanwhile the real assault would be going through like a dagger slipped between the ribs: or, to be up-to-date, like a shell from that new rocket-firing gun which killed a tank with a single shot. "Bazooka"—that was it: an apt code-name for this assault.

The staff officers were sceptical; Bach-Zelewski was impolite. Skorzeny's plan was at last accepted—as so often—only for lack of a better. And then, towards midnight, a senior Hungarian officer asked for a parley. Skorzeny's friends agreed that although the Castle was simply playing for time until the Armistice became effective, they should take the move at its face value.

The visitor began by complaining of all this German military activity: Horthy's anxiety for peace with the Russians did not, he hoped, exclude friendship with his old allies.

Why, then, the Germans asked, were their diplomats penned up on Castle Hill? Why should they not come down into the town? Surely the chivalrous Hungarians respected diplomatic

privilege? An Ambassador and his staff isolated by force—it was unheard of: worse, it was discourteous.

The visitor flushed. Skorzeny thought this a hopeful sign that others on Castle Hill might be shamed into softening their betrayal with at least the forms of courtesy. So he asked that as a token of faith the road which the Ambassador usually took—that which brought him through the Vienna Gate—should be reopened. The demand would be made official: unless the mines and barricades were cleared from this one road by six a.m. Germany would "draw the necessary conclusions".

The Hungarian wavered; the Germans pressed their argument. It might be that the Regent—an old sailor—did not recognise the absurdity of blocking a road already protected by cross-fire, every step of it under the guns of the garrison. But their visitor, a military man, could surely see this with half an eye. He should also understand the value of give-and-take in this tricky situation.

The Hungarian promised at least to try to have their wishes met. Nobody wanted to fall foul of the Germans, he protested, so long as they kept the peace. And then with a mannerly farewell he drove off into the night.

So far so good, but whatever the Hungarians chose to do, "Bazooka" must go on. Skorzeny called his officers to explain to them the plan. Then half an hour before daylight his units quietly moved into the approaches of Castle Hill. To every man was repeated: "Do not open fire. Safety catches on. Whatever happens you must not fire unless an officer tells you to."

In the dim light before an autumn dawn the column was drawn up—not for a battle, one would have said: rather for a march-past in battle array. Once more in uniform, Skorzeny took the lead in a command car with five N.C.O.s: each carried a bazooka and a bunch of grenades on his belt.

Four Panther tanks followed; they had been borrowed on their way up to the Russian front, for there were only six German tanks in all Budapest. Then a group of radio-piloted land torpedoes: dwarf tanks, packed with explosives, which could be sent head-on at a barricade to blow it up.

Platoon by platoon, the assault troops crowded in their vehicles brought up the rear of the column. A last check to see all

safety catches were on; this was made by Skorzeny's old hands, who no longer believed the army adage that the soldier's best friend is his rifle: they relied on their leader, his legend and his luck.

Luck now was surely wanted. Without benefit of patrols, scouts or covering fire, Skorzeny was going head-foremost into a hostile area, highly fortified. Once again he was backing his estimate of the soldier's mind. No garrison, he hoped, could fire on peaceable troops peaceably marching: men whose credentials were vouched for by their very lack of precautions. It simply was not in the book.

Of course, if he proved wrong, his tightly bunched columns would be ripped from end to end.

Five minutes to six: engines broke the tension with a roar. Upright in his command car, Skorzeny raised his hand and swept it forward. They were off.

The main hazard on the first lap—the long, steep road that led to the Vienna Gate—was the danger of land-mines. When Skorzeny got under way he was braced every moment for an explosion under his wheels. Fifty yards, a hundred, he stood rigid as they gathered speed. Nothing happened: the mines had after all been moved. Now for the barricades.

Another minute and the dark bulk of the Vienna Gate came into view. There was a barrier across the road; but a gleam of light beyond proved a passage had been cut in it. So their midnight visitor had prevailed on Horthy to trust in his garrison's alertness.

Men moved out of the shadows of the Gate—sentries. This was the testing-moment. Skorzeny held his course with only a slight drop in speed. The sentries stared: no orders had reached them about a German column coming, but people who rode up with such noisy assurance surely had permission. The leading car rushed on them. Skorzeny waved cheerfully; the darkness of the gate enveloped him—he was through.

Behind came a tank and then three more tanks: each thundered up to the gate with its commander standing in the open turret, hand at the salute: the very acme of military politeness. Skorzeny heard the deep, unbroken roar gaining ground behind him. The road ahead was clear; already he was high above the

roofs and tree-tops of the sleeping capital. A huge, square shape appeared as they reached the summit. It was the Castle barracks.

Sand-bagged emplacements flanked the gates; machine-gunners stood ready; the first burst of fire would bring a thousand men tumbling out. But again Skorzeny's airy salute as he came up —and the certainty that this column had passed unhindered through the Vienna Gate—reassured the sentries. Skorzeny passed on without a backward glance. The column wheeled after him: row after row of backs presented to the enemy. Two kinds of discipline were matched: the mechanical reaction of the defenders, the self-control Skorzeny had taught his troops.

The machine-gunners did not fire. Instead, they accepted the vulnerability of the Germans as proof of title to be there. Away down the mile-long avenue which led past the German Embassy Skorzeny drove at top speed. Half the column followed; the rest had split off to take a second avenue which also led to Horthy's palace. The roar of trucks and tanks rose in crescendo as his convoy crashed past the Ministry of War, where lay another thousand men at arms. The Castle Square opened out before them. An immense mass rose up across the chasm of its courtyards: the Regent's palace.

Action! Three heavy tanks were facing them. When their Hungarian commanders saw the tornado approaching, their guns turned upwards to the sky. A high brick wall shielded the palace gate. Skorzeny swerved aside and waved a Panther on: it crashed through the rampart. He jumped from his car. Eight men went after him through the gap, led by von Foelkersam, who would take over if he were hit.

And there, guarding the palace, were six anti-tank guns. How would the Panthers fare? Skorzeny did not pause to see. He bolted through an archway into the building. Already the alarm had sounded. An agitated figure rushed towards him—the colonel of the guard; von Foelkersam leaped forward and a pistol went spinning from the colonel's hand.

Another Hungarian officer sprang out as they ran on. "Quick," shouted Skorzeny. "Come with me. I have to see the Commandant at once."

Politics are the soldier's curse: the Hungarian must have supposed the situation had somehow changed—someone else should

sort this out. He headed up a marble staircase, with Skorzeny at his heels. Von Foelkersam and his corporal's guard followed to the second floor, there to be posted while Skorzeny went on with the Hungarian to the Commandant's office. In the anteroom a soldier was training a machine-gun through the window at the Germans: it was struck out of his hand and dropped down into the courtyard. Then Skorzeny knocked on the Commandant's door.

One cannot enter into the feelings of the Hungarian general who was faced by a gigantic intruder demanding his surrender. Castle Hill, said this stranger, was already in German hands, but some shooting could still be heard: a cease-fire must at once be sounded. Further bloodshed would not do anyone any good—and the hint was given emphasis with a revolver.

Then one of Skorzeny's N.C.O.s came in to report, with Major von Foelkersam's compliments, that the courtyard and main entrance had been secured; what orders next? Skorzeny looked at the general—and the general, after a brief internal struggle, gave in. Fire was still crackling from the gardens of the castle: officers went out to stop it.

Skorzeny was not yet content. Gentleness, "more powerful than Hercules," should lead the way to reconciliation; and for that, *amour propre* must be restored.

First, the Hungarian general. His hand enfolded in a consoling clasp, he heard himself congratulated on his humane decision to submit. Hungary, he was glowingly assured, would think well of him.

Next, the officers. Skorzeny found a hostile group in the anteroom; before they could protest he asked the names of two majors and appointed them his liaison officers. They were to see to the piling up of their soldiers' arms in the courtyard: chivalry dictated that the officers should keep their revolvers. Then Skorzeny called them all together in the Coronation Hall and addressed them in German, which is understood by educated Hungarians.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I am happy that we have now put an end to our misunderstanding. Germany and Hungary have never in history quarrelled; always they have fought together against a common enemy. Now that once again the barbarian is at our gates we must close our ranks against him."

And so on; it was Skorzeny's first political speech, but it struck a soldierly note and he could see the Hungarians were softened by the cousinly Austrian accent to which he gave full play. When he had ended his appeal, they stepped forward one by one to salute and take his hand. Then they withdrew unescorted. Skorzeny was master of Castle Hill.

Famous victories, battles which make a noise in the world and leave their mark on history, are expected to pay a dignified fee in casualties. The battle of Budapest cost altogether seven lives, while twenty-six men were wounded. The departure from custom in adding together casualties on rival sides must also be excused, since Skorzeny insisted on a joint funeral. This ceremony was held next day with military pomp, which was balm to the feelings of the Hungarian Army.

The Regent, in the meantime, had flown. Skorzeny found his apartments empty. Later he heard that Admiral Horthy had left the palace to put himself under the protection of General Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, a relation of the ex-Kaiser. Within a few hours his abdication was announced and his rudderless Government had been replaced. Count Szalasi, who had the Germans' confidence, became Prime Minister; he at once cancelled the armistice proclamation.

Next morning the new War Minister, General Bereckzy, called to thank Skorzeny for driving Horthy out and capturing the Hill without harming the proud buildings. Skorzeny accepted this tribute to the German Army—saying nothing of Bach-Zelewski with his monstrous cannon.

Congratulations came from the Wolf's Lair, and orders to "take up residence" in the palace. Skorzeny moved into the Regent's wing, with its sumptuous furniture and tapestries, reminders of a vanished world. That evening he splashed about in the imperial bathtub carved with cupids for Franz Joseph. In the banqueting hall, his officers held festival. Skorzeny took the high chair: cobwebbed vintages were brought up for "His Excellency's" approval. There had always been a Constable of Castle Hill—now the office was Skorzeny's.

Three days later, Skorzeny met his antagonist for the first time. He was formally presented to Admiral Horthy in the house of General Pfeffer-Wildenbruch: with the end of his régime the

Regent was to be conveyed to Germany in Horthy's own special train. Skorzeny explained that he would be lodged as a guest of honour in a Bavarian castle, a very secure castle indeed, to which he himself would have the privilege of escorting him. The conversation was constrained. On Horthy's last drive through the capital he had ruled for so long hardly a hand waved him farewell.

Operation "Bazooka" let Hitler out of a very tight corner. The million Germans on the Carpathians hardly knew the fate they had escaped; the Hungarian Army fought on beside them to the last day of the war.

CHAPTER IX

> They are decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, all-powerful for impotence. WINSTON CHURCHILL
>
> *Pas trop de zèle.* TALLEYRAND

"A COMMANDO mission depends absolutely upon long and minute preparation." With this axiom from a captured British report Karl Radl often raised a smile in the early days of extemporisation at Friedenthal; but as time went on with no easing of the breathless scramble it ceased to be a joke.

For each project Skorzeny carried out, a score of others were still-born, or foredoomed by the slapdash assumptions of superiors whose eyes were shut to the first essential of strategic surprise: preparation.

"Immense ability" has been credited to the German General Staff, yet even their most generous admirer, Captain Liddell Hart, has acknowledged that his Prussian paragons "frowned on all novel ideas, especially by amateurs". Skorzeny was an "amateur" first and last; his ideas were as new as pins and as prickly to handle, so the generals used their immense ability to quibble over his proposals and nullify his schemes with the age-old arts of obstruction and delay. And when his fame grew and his organisation expanded in spite of everything, they saw to it that Friedenthal was kept on pitifully short commons.

Throughout that year of Allied victory Skorzeny kept probing for chinks in the enemy's armour; in the Middle East particularly he saw great hope: Iraq, Suez, Baku were promising openings in the chain mail.

Saboteurs were to wreck the Iraq oil stations which pumped the fuel of Britain's Mediterranean campaign from the Persian Gulf to Haifa and Tripoli, but the air squadron attached to Skorzeny's headquarters had no long-range planes. He thought—

why not use American bombers which had been forced down behind the German lines? Six captured Fortresses were put in order. When all was ready they were destroyed by an Allied bombing raid. No long-range planes could be wrung out of the Air Ministry so the whole scheme came to naught.

Frogmen of Skorzeny's Danube group were taught to blow up ships across a waterway; this technique might have choked the Suez Canal for weeks or months, forcing the British to use the long way round the Cape to the Far East. But by the time the High Command approved, the Allied grip on the Mediterranean was too tight.

The main Soviet oil centre of Baku was picked out for a visit; airborne parties, by blowing up a few points, might have stopped the flow of petrol to the Red armies. Once again, it took so long to get the scheme agreed that by then the Balkan airfields from which Skorzeny's troops could have taken off had been lost.

One project after another on which much effort had been spent was buried with the epitaph "Too late". Skorzeny struggled on; he would clutch at any straw to slow Germany's rush to destruction. His men shared his disregard for odds; but the most desperate venture he embarked on was in partnership with a woman.

Slight, fair-haired and blue-eyed, Fräulein Hanna Reitsch was a test-pilot of almost insane bravery: the only woman, indeed the only civilian, throughout the war to win the Iron Cross First Class. Before anyone knew jets were being built in Germany she took up one of the first jet-planes; it was faulty and crashed. For months she was in hospital, then for months she fought to get her nerve back. Unable even to sit on a chair for fear of falling, she had herself carried to the roof of her house in order to master her terror. One day she invited friends to luncheon at the airport. They arrived to find a new type of plane circling overhead. It came down, and out jumped Hanna. "I can fly again; I can fly!"

Meeting her at Hitler's headquarters during that summer of 1944, Skorzeny had been struck by her fanaticism: like Joshua, she would have the sun held in the sky until victory was won. They talked of Peenemünde, and the series of V weapons which was being produced at the secret rocket research station there. Some time before Skorzeny had seen the trial of the V1; as he watched its tearing flight over the Baltic and later examined its

simple mechanism he thought: if you could put a steersman into a naval torpedo, then why not a piloted flying-bomb? Instead of falling at random, a V1 could be driven dead on to an exact target —the House of Commons in full session, if you liked—by a pilot who was willing to die. Skorzeny had a horror of missions with no hope of return but, after all, thousands of German airmen, grounded by the aircraft shortage, were going into the line as untrained infantry: any among them who volunteered to pilot a V1 would know, at least, that his life was not being thrown away for nothing. One life for a Ministry, a warship or a troop transport: it was an expedient worthy of Germany's straits.

Flying back from Peenemünde, Skorzeny called together that same evening technical experts from the Air Ministry and the aircraft firms Heinkel and Focke-Wulf. They worked all night at Friedenthal on drawings and calculations; by morning the design was ready and next day it was on the desk of the air chief, Marshal Milch. For the first time Skorzeny invoked the Leader's name, insisting brazenly that Hitler had himself approved the idea of a piloted V1 and wanted immediate results. Objections by three Air Force commissions were overcome and Milch gave the plan his blessing: they might hope to start construction in about three months' time, he thought.

It was then that Skorzeny spoke of the idea to Hanna Reitsch. Why, this was wonderful, she cried; the same idea had come to her during a trip to Peenemünde, but no one would listen to it. Fired by Hanna's excitement, Skorzeny went back to Friedenthal with the determination to cut Milch's three months' timetable to three weeks. Hangars sprang up; engineers and mechanics worked night and day; in a fortnight the first V1 with a cockpit and controls was wheeled on the airfield.

Then came the trials. Instead of the usual rocket-start, the V1 with its pilot was lifted into the air by a mother plane and released at three thousand five hundred feet; then, with its wake of flame, it shot off at nearly four hundred miles an hour. After a few circles over the airfield, the pilot came in to land. He crashed; technicians could not make out why.

Hanna saw the shattered V1, and next day another which met the same fate; both pilots lived but were too badly injured to explain what had gone wrong. Skorzeny was resigned to defeat

when the Air Ministry put a stop to further trials. But Hanna would not have it. "Ignore the ban," she said, "and I'll take the next one up myself."

Skorzeny was scandalised. As a last plea he urged that if anything happened to her he himself would lose his head.

"What!" cried Hanna. "And they told me you were a soldier with the courage to disobey."

In the end Hanna got her way, as she always did. Skorzeny told the station commander that the Air Ministry had telephoned him lifting the ban. Once more a V1 was taken up; once more it circled, lost height—and this time landed smoothly. Skorzeny ran to lift Hanna out of the machine. She pulled off her helmet. "I knew it," she declared. "Those other two did not know how to bring down fast planes."

After a score of trials Skorzeny went back to Milch at the Air Ministry and told him the truth. The Marshal was not pleased. "This madness might have brought you to the gallows," he growled.

Soon a hundred volunteers were in training for the one-way road to glory. Thirty were ex-pilots from his Friedenthal battalion, the rest Air Force flyers without planes. Test models were followed by two-seater training planes, and at last the real thing —the piloted V1 ready to go over. New tactics were sketched out; each piloted plane would fly in a covey of ordinary flying-bombs so that enemy fire would be dispersed. By this time the orthodox V1 was no longer a secret; "buzzbombs" were falling in hundreds around London and the Channel ports—a nuisance, but far from an intolerable one. Skorzeny dared to hope that in a few weeks a very different kind of attack would start.

But he had reckoned without the bureaucrats: gradually the fuel supply was screwed down, and training slowed with it. In vain did Karl Radl send over to Berlin his salvoes of forms and departmental minutes, in vain Skorzeny spent hours on the long-distance telephone or pacing the corridors of the Wilhelmstrasse. Promises were all they got. By the autumn, training came to a stop, never to be resumed. The mother of Parliaments still stands.

Constantly Skorzeny seemed to be caught between the two extremes—generals who believed nothing and Party leaders who believed anything. Shortly after his piloted flying bomb had been

abandoned—and the Air Force volunteers had "stowed away" in one or other of the Friedenthal commando units—he mentioned during a visit to Hitler's headquarters the prospect of launching V1s from U-boats at sea.

Himmler jumped up in sudden excitement. "That's the way we can bombard New York," he exclaimed. "Skorzeny, you must push on with research at top speed. Here is a God-sent chance to punish America for bombing Germany!"

Skorzeny protested that the V1 was far from accurate, even from land bases. Launched from a rolling submarine . . . But Himmler was scarcely listening. He had gone over to an immense map of the Atlantic and stood before it, entranced with his new vision. Skorzeny looked round for an ally: Schellenberg was in the room; the young careerist who had advised him always to greet the ideas of his superiors with rapture was nodding delighted approval, even though Himmler's back was turned. Having survived the terrors of the July 20 plot, Schellenberg had stepped into the shoes of the disgraced Admiral Canaris; there was no help for Skorzeny there. But he tried once more to disabuse Himmler. Bombing of such an aimless kind would infuriate the United States, he objected, without doing real damage. Now if they had agents ashore to steer in the V1's with an electronic device which the scientists were perfecting—but Himmler was lost in his map of the world. "It is America's turn to have some bombs," he repeated; "they will never stand up to them." As he turned back to Skorzeny his pale eyes behind the pince-nez glistened with unwonted emotion. "Let me know how it goes," he said. "Keep me informed."

While Germany was being sucked down, weeks had to be devoted to hare-brained schemes for wonder-weapons which could not be used. Often Skorzeny wanted to throw in his hand; then some horrifying emergency on one front or another would claim his energies. After all else had failed, the generals and politicians thought of Friedenthal; for when it came to getting them out of a pickle, Skorzeny was their man.

In September 1944, Germany was shaken by the great airborne landing over the mouths of the Rhine. It was a bold bid, and might have shortened the war by months had it fully succeeded; Skorzeny was thankful that the Allies had not gone instead for

Berlin. Even the High Command had been transferred to the capital, where all the strands of headquarters and commands were now knotted together.

The Allies tried for the lesser prizes of clearing Antwerp as a supply port and outflanking the Siegfried Line at Arnhem. They were beaten by bad weather, but the British 101st Division, even after withdrawing from Arnhem, clung to a salient across the Waal—the westernmost Rhine mouth—and were still there when the Guards Division broke through by road to join them. Within this salient of a few score square miles were the twin road and railway bridges of Nymegen, which had been called "the gateway to the Fatherland".

Hitler sounded the alarm: for ten days the salient was the most savagely contested corner of the earth. German division after division, at least a dozen attacks by infantry and armour, were beaten off. Göring's remaining dive-bombers went up; nearly six hundred planes tried to smash the bridges and failed. With every hour the British grip tightened.

Skorzeny's frogmen went to this battle-front in Holland. The British line swung over the Waal and curved back to recross the river fifteen miles on; at the centre of this arc, protected by thousands of troops and ringed with guns, lay the two bridges which carried the spearhead of the thrust into Germany.

German headquarters lacked even a good chart of the river; Skorzeny had to draw on the memory of an old Rhine steamer skipper for details. Then Captain Hummel, a frogman who had sunk nearly forty thousand tons of Allied shipping single-handed, went out on a sortie. In rubber suit with camouflage net over his face, Hummel swam downstream through the enemy. It was night, but presently tracer shells showed him the outline of the road bridge; he clung to a slimy arch, alone and defenceless, working out his plans, while the British tanks and guns rumbled over his head. Then he moved through the water for another half-mile until a pylon of the railway bridge loomed up: a monolith, quite thirty feet across from the upstream side of the bridge to the other, and twelve feet thick. Silently he swam on until he gained German-held territory again beyond the salient.

Already Skorzeny's men had brought some half-ton U-boat torpedo mines to the upstream edge of the salient; under darkness

the mines were trundled down to the river. It was a lively journey: one or two British shells burst near by, wounding some of the helpers. In the water the cigar-shaped mines were linked in couples—each couple would span a bridge pylon—and fourteen frogmen, led by Hummel, set off to guide them with the current.

The bridges were reached, the mines secured; valves opened, time fuses set to go off when they touched the river bed—here the utmost damage, by violent displacement of water, would be done. Then the swimmers slipped away downstream. They heard the explosions—and at once the river was aflame, with the British on both banks firing at everything that moved. Dawn was creeping up and bullets splashed all round. Two men were wounded; their comrades held them up but, when they got ashore, found they were dead. Four others were brought back unharmed by Captain Hummel. The rest were forced out of the water and taken prisoner.

Not for some time after did Skorzeny learn the result of that night's work, although a slackening of pressure against the German front could at once be felt. The railway bridge was destroyed; seventy yards were blown away altogether. The road bridge was badly damaged and the British had to build a Bailey bridge on pontoons. For a day or two the British in the salient were cut off. Skorzeny does not doubt that if his frogmen had been called on earlier both bridges could have been completely wrecked; the "gateway to the Fatherland" would have been barred. As it was, for the cost of two lives, Skorzeny's frogmen succeeded after divisions of troops with tanks and an armada of planes had failed.

Arnhem and Nymegen gave the Allies pause; the thrust to the heart of Germany would have to be delayed. Already the cementing of the south-eastern front had freed German forces for a venture which was in Hitler's mind even before the Hungarian crisis arose. This was the hour Hitler had been awaiting. It gave him the chance of a supreme gamble and part of his plan was so outrageous that only one man could fill the bill.

"Send for Skorzeny," he said.

CHAPTER X

We can still lose this war!

GENERAL PATTON, during the Ardennes battle of December 1944

At the height of Hitler's last offensive in the West, which came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, four men in a Jeep tore up to a filling-station behind General Hodges' First Army front in the Ardennes forests: "Petrol, please!" the driver shouted.

That was a mistake. American soldiers do not ask for petrol but for "gas"; nor, in a hurry, do they say "please".

"Where are you from?" somebody asked. The driver did not wait. He put in his clutch and drove off down the icy road—into a convoy of trucks. The Jeep overturned. When the occupants were pulled out it was found that under their G.I. jackets they wore the field grey of the German Army.

Soon a shaking prisoner, told to speak up or be shot, blurted out that his Jeep was only one of many; German troops disguised as Allies were filtering through all along the front. Thousands more were to cross the lines—with American uniforms, vehicles, tanks and guns. The purpose of the operation was to converge on Allied headquarters in Paris and kill or kidnap General Eisenhower. Colonel Otto Skorzeny was their leader.

Skorzeny—the man who made off with Mussolini! From that hour, as reports flashed in from one point or another on a hundred miles of raging battle-front, similar captures threw Allied Supreme Headquarters into consternation. Always the same story when the prisoners broke down—objective: to get Eisenhower; leader: Skorzeny.

Now the fact is that Skorzeny never tried to lay hands on Eisenhower—it was not in his orders: he was playing a very different game. His real mission, and its bizarre consequences, had a more

significant lesson for the future than another Skorzeny kidnapping attempt could have offered.

The affair began as usual, with a trip to Hitler's headquarters. It was moving day: the Wolf's Lair was in danger of becoming a "front headquarters" in fact as well as name; so the High Command was being shifted before it could come under the Red Army's guns. In spite of this upset Skorzeny was received by an effusive Hitler who rewarded his success in Hungary with promotion and the German Cross in Gold. Then, when they were alone, the Leader drew him aside with a conspiratorial gesture.

"I have something to tell you," he began dramatically. "The world thinks Germany is finished, with only the day and hour of the funeral to be appointed. I am going to show how mistaken they are. The corpse will rise and hurl itself in fury at the West. Then we shall see!"

He took Skorzeny over to a wall map. It showed how Germany's armies had been driven back to where they stood in 1940 before starting the *blitzkrieg* which shattered France and threw the British off the Continent in three summer weeks. Now the last thing anyone would foresee, Hitler contended, was a second attack on the same sector: that was where he meant, in the coming winter, to strike a sledge-hammer blow that would split the Allied front in the Ardennes.

He put a finger on the Belgian supply port of Antwerp: the target, to be reached in a week from D-day. The enemy in North Belgium and Holland would be cut off—Montgomery's British and Canadian armies as well as most of the American First Army —and would all be driven into the sea. The rest of the American Armies south of Antwerp would be strung out for nearly five hundred miles from the North Sea to Switzerland. With their northern wing chopped off, they would have more stomach for recrimination than for fighting.

Such was the plan of attack which Hitler unfolded to Skorzeny on October 20. Later, military writers were to call it the "battle of impossibilities": the place, the time, even the idea, of a German counter-offensive were unthinkable to experts on both sides. German generals in the West hoped for no more than a holding action while Hitler, or his successors, negotiated sur-

render. Eisenhower and Montgomery agreed there was no fear of Hitler's fighting power being revived.

Any suggestion that the quarry might leap at the throat of its hunters was ruled out. General Omar Bradley, whose Twelfth Army Group was to take the brunt of the offensive, later defended this view in terms of military logic. "When anyone attacks, either he is out to destroy the hostile forces or he is going for a terrain objective. Neither objective could be attained in the Ardennes."* What the Allies could not guess was that Hitler had abandoned military logic and was now in the stratosphere of political intuition.

He told Skorzeny that he meant to exploit Allied uneasiness over the advances which were bringing the Russians so deeply into Western Europe. Many British and American leaders would welcome any means of stopping this landslide, but they could do nothing in the face of their peoples' admiration for their "heroic Soviet allies". A violent shock might bring the masses to reason; confronted with a second Dunkirk, they would be ready to cry quits. Then, under cover of a truce with the West, Germany could turn and throw her whole weight against Russia.

Hitler explained that he had been waiting for this opportunity ever since the landings in Normandy. The Allies' supply-lines were stretched, their equipment was worn in continuous fighting, their armies were both over-strained and over-confident. On the other hand, Hitler expected thousands of new tanks, guns and jet-planes from the factories; his roads to the front were short; new divisions were freed for action in the West by the plugging of the south-east front.

When he came to the part Skorzeny should play, Hitler was aquiver: it would be as complete a surprise as the horse of Troy; and on its success the fortunes of the whole operation might turn.

The first obstacle facing the German armies after cracking the Allied crust would be the Meuse River, he said. Somehow they must pursue the fleeing enemy across it without respite. The one way to do that was to seize the Meuse bridges before they could be blown up. That task he would entrust to Skorzeny—and also the means to do it. He must raise an armoured brigade in the image of the enemy; wearing their uniforms and driving their

* *A Soldier's Story.*

vehicles. Such a brigade could mingle with the routed Allies and hold the bridges for the German armies to cross over. Smaller groups of disguised troops would scout ahead for the brigade and do everything they could to demoralise the enemy.

Skorzeny's first thought was that every man who joined such a venture would face a firing squad on capture. Hitler reminded him that British commandos had often used German uniform, and quite lately some Americans had slipped through at Aachen by the same ruse. "We will give these people a dose of their own medicine," he said.

A dose? An armoured brigade in Allied uniform might be called the whole pharmacopœia. And as if to make the mixture more abhorrent to Skorzeny, Hitler forbade him categorically to cross the lines with his troops: "That will not be necessary; and we cannot afford to lose you at this stage."

Skorzeny was silently deciding that to slip over to his men *after* they had crossed would not infringe the letter of this injunction, when the Leader added almost casually, "You have until the first of December to make ready." Skorzeny at once pointed out that in so short a time he could only hope for a rough and ready job of improvisation. Hitler heard him out, then replied, "All that is true, but in five or six weeks' time we must attack. I know that you will do your best."

Given all the good will in the world, five or six months would have been little enough for so extraordinary a task, but soon Skorzeny saw that he would have to fight tooth and nail for any help at all. Hardly any of the Army chiefs outside Hitler's personal staff had yet been informed of what was coming. The one commander who did know all and whose support was most essential, was Field-Marshal von Rundstedt—and he was bitterly against the whole idea.

Not long before, von Rundstedt had been sacked after a stand-up row with Hitler; now he returned to take charge of the Ardennes attack. But anyone who jumps to the conclusion that von Rundstedt believed in the offensive misunderstands the nature of this military basilisk; privately he called Hitler's plan "stupid and nonsensical"; he had no faith in it at all. Why, then, did he agree to lead it?

"As commander-in-chief in the West," this haughtiest of generals later complained, "I found the pressure of Hitler behind me was always far worse than the pressure of the Allies in front. I had only enough independence to change the guard at my gate."

Von Rundstedt's pride was further bruised when Hitler gave Skorzeny a direct briefing; it became clear that the new brigade would have to get itself born in spite of him.

And then the High Command itself committed one of the sublime blunders of the war. Field-Marshal Keitel signed a circular to all units in Germany:

Very Secret: To Divisional and Army Commands only.

"Officers and men who speak English are wanted for a special mission. Volunteers selected will join a new unit under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Skorzeny, to whose headquarters at Friedenthal application should be made."

Skorzeny passed his copy to Karl Radl to add to his anthology of High Command *incredibilia*; then he sat down and wrote asking that his mission should be cancelled. Since the secret had been advertised it would be foolish to go on.

The Armed S.S. liaison officer at the High Command was General Fegelein, who in 1942 had married the sister of Eva Braun. Fegelein was shocked at Skorzeny's lack of realism. Surely he must know that his part in the offensive could not be put off unless they went to the Leader about it. And how could they confess such a mistake to Hitler? The mission would proceed as planned.

It happened that no harm was done; like so many bungles it was neutralised by one on the other side. General Bradley said later that the order did indeed reach Allied Intelligence; but no one took much notice of it.

Skorzeny had little time to brood. The volunteers came streaming in to Friedenthal from every part of Germany. Their spirit was magnificent; they were hot for adventure, ready for anything —except a language test. Then most of them began to scratch their heads or else replied "Yes" or "No" at a venture. A few hundred insisted they had been fluent at school—the language would come back to them. About a hundred and fifty had an

academic knowledge of English; some thirty or forty had been abroad and spoke it quite well.

Skorzeny made the High Command realise that to create an effective, English-speaking brigade out of these volunteers in the short time he had left was no more than a pipe-dream. He demanded, and got, a group of complete units—two tank battalions, a paratroop battalion, and signallers. To these he added two battalions of his own, making up a striking force which would give a good account of itself with or without disguise. He also made the High Command agree that the brigade would not be sent into battle in American uniform unless a full-scale rout of the enemy had already begun. To fulfil the second half of Hitler's order—for disguised scouts to go ahead of the brigade to bring back information and sow confusion—he built up a special commando company of the best English-speaking volunteers. All were told, on the authority of a German military lawyer, that it was a legitimate *ruse de guerre* to wear enemy uniform so long as you did not actually fight in it: Skorzeny hoped that the Americans would share this view—if they had ever heard of it.

The brightest candidates were sent off to an interpreters' school, but on their return a fresh problem arose. It had now been decided to use his brigade entirely against the American sector of the front, so all the men must pass as Americans. A few volunteers were sent into prison cages to "wise up" on the idiom: the real prisoners usually "got wised up" first, and at least one impostor was badly beaten at one of these finishing schools. In the end Skorzeny had to advise most of the men to rush past the enemy with teeth clenched, as though shell-shocked.

But even a deaf-mute column must somewhere come to rest and be exposed to close observation. G.I. behaviour was taught to the men, but the bark of the Prussian drill sergeant still echoed in their ears. Whenever Skorzeny came on a group they would stiffen to attention. "Relax," he would beg—and the stamp of boots to an "at ease" position would ring across the square. To stroll by, hands in pockets; to chew gum, and park it; to flick a cigarette out of a "pack"; all the effortless arts—even that of failing to see, and hence salute, one's officers off duty—had to be expounded. To these puzzled proselytes, the democratic way of life was "something else again".

In a special training-camp near Nuremberg, Skorzeny sorted out his men, nearly three thousand five hundred of them, and made section leaders; then he waited for the American equipment. General Jodl had promised there would be plenty for all—"just ask for what you want". Experienced in whittling down his needs, Skorzeny decided to sacrifice all extras, even to field kitchens, in favour of fire-power. He put in a request for twenty Sherman tanks, thirty armoured cars, vehicles for three battalions of motorised infantry, guns for anti-tank companies and an anti-aircraft company.

But Jodl had been optimistic when he said there was booty for all needs. Continuous retreat is not the way to capture arms and equipment.

Of the twenty Sherman tanks Skorzeny wanted he got two—with apologies from the Inspector of Armoured Vehicles who had no more to send. German Panther tanks had to make up the lack. Their outlines were altered with sheets of tin—and the further you stood away from them, said Radl consolingly, the better they looked: with great good luck they might be mistaken for Shermans a mile away in the dusk.

Six American armoured cars arrived. Protests brought four more, but they were British: how could their appearance in an American sector be explained? Discussion ended when all four broke down on trial—obviously they had been left for junk. Again, German cars had to be camouflaged with khaki paint and white stars on the bonnets.

Jeeps: every other officer Skorzeny met seemed to have captured a Jeep for his private use. But on the day Jodl's order called them in, every Jeep in Germany vanished. So much, scoffed Radl, for requisitioning: he sent out foragers, who found fifteen Jeeps hidden in barns and warehouses. A few German Fords were painted khaki, and Czech and French cars were added.

The guns arrived: only half as many as they wanted, but still more than they hoped for. Ammunition came too, several railway wagons of American shells, most of which exploded next day thanks to inexpert unloading by newly arrived men. In the end only the special commando company could be fitted out with American weapons. To every protest the High Command now

had a single answer: "Why worry? There will be plenty for the taking when the Americans begin to run."

The first load of uniforms had to be sent back: they were British. Then came a variety of American greatcoats; since the troops opposite were in field jackets, these were useless too. Field jackets at last appeared—covered with prisoner-of-war triangles which had to be got off. "Never mind," they told Skorzeny, "you can pick up all you want after the break-through." He could discover no American uniform of his size, and in the face of Hitler's order not to cross the lines he dared not ask for one. So the brigade commander had to wear a khaki sweater.

Then the rumours started. You cannot put thousands of men behind palisades, forbid them to go out, censor their letters, submit them to a strange training scheme and prolong the mystification week after week, without producing a forcing-ground for stories of all kinds. Rumours—there was no killing them; they drew fresh life from each denial. At first Skorzeny was worried; then, as the guesses became wilder, he decided to confirm the most extravagant, so to speak, with a wink.

For a while most of the volunteers believed their mission was to strike across France and relieve the Germans cut off in Brest and Lorient: someone or other had even seen the plans for this. Then, one morning, a talkative young officer sought out Skorzeny: he knew Paris intimately, and so could be of much help in the coming operation. "Why," said Skorzeny, "what do you suppose we mean to do?" The young man looked around to see if they were alone. "We're going to dash through the American Army and capture Eisenhower's headquarters!"

Skorzeny was startled; he tried to look concerned as well: "Where did you hear that?" he exclaimed. "Don't mention it to anyone . . . When the time comes, I will call on you."

Next day the camp seethed with the news of the coming swoop on Paris, where Eisenhower's H.Q. were presumed to be. The story fell in pat with Skorzeny's reputation; it also suited the code-name of the operation: "Greif". "Greif" is a mythical bird, but it can also mean "grasp": hence the young officer's inspiration. Soon everyone knew that disguised columns would race to the century-old Café de la Paix—no obscurer rendezvous would do—and there join forces under the shadow of the green-

domed Opera House to "grasp" Eisenhower from his office chair. Skorzeny did nothing to discourage the report: it might help to confuse the enemy if it got about.

Presently he had graver preoccupations. During the priming of the Ardennes offensive he attended three High Command meetings; with the Wolf's Lair in East Prussia abandoned to the Russians, Hitler had moved his staff—and his last hopes of victory—to the Chancellery in Berlin. The gloomy howl of air-raid sirens matched the depression that sank into Skorzeny as, at each meeting, the promised totals of men and material for the main offensive dwindled.

When Hitler first confided in him he had talked of six thousand guns smashing the Allied front line, of a thousand tanks to spearhead the way to Antwerp, of the three thousand jet-planes which Göring was building to challenge the Allied mastery of the sky. Now it became obvious that nothing like these totals could be hoped for: thanks to incessant bombing new armaments were not coming off the production lines on time and the wherewithal could not be gleaned from other fronts: every commander, especially in the East, clung to what he had—nothing, nothing could be spared.

Twice D-day was put off while the High Command scraped up what they could. The final meeting at Hitler's Chancellery was macabre. There sat von Rundstedt, sunk in aggrieved silence, nominal leader of a cause in which he did not even profess belief, while the experts conjured up phrases to fill the gaps in material. The flying bomb—"a wonderful weapon, its aim is much improved"—must make up for the lack of artillery and bombers. All other deficiencies would be met "when we have broken through"—including four-fifths of their fuel needs.

The last total which Skorzeny heard, mentioned almost casually, was that of jet-planes ready to take off. Instead of the promised three thousand, Germany would have three hundred and fifty.

The day came. Surprise, complete, knocked the breath out of the Americans at dawn on December 16. Bombing of their forward airfields, followed by fog, held the Allied air forces down. Snow and ice clogged their reserves.

Skorzeny's advance scouts, who had been given the best Jeeps, and the most convincing uniforms and identity papers, went

ahead with the spearheads of the Sixth S.S. Panzer Army; they were to cross the lines after splitting up into several groups.

The rest of the brigade waited at their jumping-off posts; when the tanks broke through they would rush ahead to join up with the rout. Above all they were not to open fire, Skorzeny warned them; their job was simply to occupy the Meuse bridges as American soldiers so that the rest of the army could take them in its stride.

Everything fulfilled Hitler's hopes—except that the Americans did not turn and run. Though von Rundstedt sheared his way fifty miles towards Namur, though the front was torn in two, the German advance stopped while the arms depots, the oil dumps—all the spoil the High Command had banked on—still lay beyond reach. While the defenders tried to gather their wits, easy-living lines-of-communication troops, cooks, signallers, supply-corps sergeants, were thrown into the breach. Then came the battle of Bastogne, the road junction which was held against all comers until General Patton's tank column pounded to the rescue.

Operation "Greif" should have been started soon after zero hour; when, twenty-four hours later, there was still no break-through for his brigade to exploit, Skorzeny wanted to call it off. "Give us another twenty-four hours," Sixth Army pleaded. Meanwhile he had sent two more of his "American" groups to reconnoitre the Meuse bridges, so that if the rout began no time would be lost in seizing them. Another twenty-four hours went by, and the enemy still did not break. Heavy reserves were coming up behind the Americans: they had rallied from the surprise —there would be no break-through now. So Skorzeny told his brigade to cast aside their camouflage and soon they were all caught up in the swirl of battle.

Behind the German lines the traffic was in chaos, as Skorzeny found when he tried to reach another sector for a council of war. Someone at headquarters had forgotten to cancel orders for the second phase of the advance, although the first phase had been frustrated. Driving past convoys stranded for lack of fuel, tankers went forward to fill up at "captured" Allied depots—depots which remained miles behind the American lines.

Skorzeny left his car on a jammed main road and trudged through the slush to the top of the hill. There he found a gigantic

trailer stuck; it had been trundling V1 parts up to a proposed new launching-base which still had to be captured. He ordered the hundreds of idle transport crews out of their lorries; together they heaved the encumbrance over the edge of the road and cleared the way—until the next V1 trailer came along. A few days later, when a misdirected flying bomb fell within a hundred yards of him, Skorzeny again cursed the High Command optimists: "a wonderful weapon—its aim is much improved"! Luckily, the missile failed even to explode.

By now the Americans were hitting back; Skorzeny put in his brigade to save the northern shoulder of the German salient, where von Rundstedt's spearheads might be severed at their base. Day after day he went from one shaky point to another, leading his troops in fighting of a grimly orthodox kind. On December 21 one of his officers blundered across the lines into Malmédy and found it thinly held; Skorzeny saw a chance to take the town. Though the brigade had no artillery left and only ten tanks, he sent in a two-pronged attack. Then up came the Americans in force. The Germans were beaten off with heavy losses: last of all to return was von Foelkersam, who was slightly wounded. Before the day was over Skorzeny also was wounded, in the head. Patched up at once, he got back to his troops in time to welcome a long-promised battery of heavy guns; *now* they would get some of their own back—and perhaps Malmédy too. The gunner officer was sorry: he had only sixteen rounds for each gun with no hope of any more.

That was Christmas Day.

On December 28 they were relieved; already clearing skies had unleashed the Allied air force, and all the way back from the front the dwindling German columns, black against the snow, were strafed by bombers. Soon the Ardennes offensive became a great retreat; altogether they lost almost a quarter of a million men in casualties and prisoners. The rest of Rundstedt's armies were swept back into Germany.

But what had happened to Skorzeny's "Americans"? In bits and pieces, as some of them came back, and later on when he could talk to all those who recrossed the lines, Skorzeny put together a picture of the little war they had conducted.

The first group of disguised volunteers had driven over the

Belgian front until they reached a cross-roads near the Meuse; they were at Huy, midway between Liége and Namur, caught up in a swirl of Jeeps and trucks. The German leader tried out his accent by asking the Americans what reinforcements they expected. After some hours an armoured regiment thundered up towards the front.

"You can't go that way," the German shouted. "You'll have to make a detour"—and he gave them one which would land them up the other side of Belgium. Off they went—"and thanks for telling us". The German said, "You're welcome."

A second group ran head-on into a company of Americans, dug in with wire and machine-guns, who misread their alarm at the confrontation. "What are you running from?" the Germans were asked. Their officer, in top sergeant's uniform, took his cue. "Scram, fellows," he called out. "They've broken through all round us!" The defenders left in haste.

Moving about almost as freely as if they were invisible, Skorzeny's groups turned sign-posts round to misdirect reserves, severed telephone and cable lines, looped red ribbons to trees to indicate that this or that road to the front was barred by mines. If "for want of a nail the battle was lost", one can imagine what such deliberate but unsuspected malevolence can do.*

But far more devastating than any material damage was the moral chaos caused by Operation "Greif". When the first disguised troops were pulled out of their capsized Jeep and made to confess, waves of shock ran through the front and rear of the defenders. A brigade of Germans in American uniform! An attack on General Eisenhower's headquarters! Otto Skorzeny in command of a specially trained murder gang! It was incredible—yet here, in these wretched prisoners, was the proof. The rock-bound certainties of army life collapsed, the laws of probability were swept away.

The stories which the prisoners had brought from Skorzeny's training-camp struck root in the alluvium left in the wake of Operation "Greif", and flourished into monstrous growth. A

* The author's thanks are due to Supreme Allied Headquarters for reminding him of the doggerel; it was framed on the wall of their Supply Headquarters in London.

week later Radio Calais was claiming that some two hundred and fifty men in American uniform had been rounded up—and Skorzeny knew that very few of them were Germans. Years afterwards he was to meet some of the victims of mistaken zeal. One American captain, because he was seen wearing a pair of German boots picked up at the front, spent a week in jail. Two others, visiting staff officers who rarely tasted canned food, incurred suspicion at a front-line mess by remarking on the excellence of the lunch; they ate their next meal under close arrest.

The prisoners' stories now linked up with Keitel's appeal for English-speaking volunteers which the Americans had filed away; stricken with remorse, U.S. Intelligence more than made up for past insouciance.

The warning went out: "Otto Skorzeny, specialist in the art of kidnapping and assassinating high personages", was on his way to Supreme Headquarters with some two hundred armed men in American uniform, all sworn to get General Eisenhower. Similar columns were looking for Montgomery, Bradley and other Allied leaders. They spoke English, and had American papers and vehicles; their one oversight was that they carried no "dog-tags" —the metal identity discs which Americans wore next to the skin. Such a detail, of course, could be checked only by challenging impostors who were reputed to throw phials of acid in the eyes of people who came too close. Furthermore, it was said that "maybe some gangsters do have dog-tags, at that".

Soon half the army was waiting for Skorzeny. The air was full of hostile spectres, in and behind the lines. Anyone might be an enemy. Those trucks beside the road could be an ambush; that quiet stranger in the bar—was he a saboteur? Such fancies did nothing to steady the defenders as they strove to recover from the Ardennes punch.

To General Bradley, in his Army Corps headquarters at Luxemburg, it was the last drop in a cup brimming with vexation. Soon he was commenting on the spectacle of "half a million G.I.s . . . playing cat and mouse with each other every time they met". He could not even drive to hard-pressed First Army headquarters; General Hodges' staff begged him to wait for a plane until the fog cleared—"because the rear areas were being panicked by disguised Germans".

High-ranking officers rushing from one conference to another found road-blocks all the way; badges of rank now meant nothing, and even passwords were distrusted. In this extremity folklore shored up the crumbling routine of the Army: suspects—and everyone was suspect—had to take part in a quiz game to establish their American birthright.

When at last General Bradley took the road in his three-star limousine, it was to find that "neither rank, nor credentials, nor protests" spared him the common inquisition. At every cross-roads he had to prove his nationality: "the first time by identifying Springfield as the capital of Massachusetts (my questioner held out for Chicago); the second time by locating the football guard between the centre and tackle on a line of scrimmage; the third time by naming the current spouse of a blonde called Betty Grable."*

Montgomery was taking over part of the ruptured American front; his liaison officers, speeding through ice and snow, found tommy-guns thrust over their frosted windows. "Who is Pruneface?" a hoarse voice would demand. "Where does Li'l Abner live? Who works with Jiggs?" British officers unfamiliar with the Declaration of Independence or the title of a whistled sample from tin-pan alley, were put under arrest; for was it not said that some of the dissembling Germans had performed a quick-change into British uniform; even that one of them was "riding round" as Field-Marshal Montgomery? No chance could be taken—and none was. Such was the burlesque offered by the impresarios of Security and enacted on a stage that was in flames.

Nor were Paris and Supreme Headquarters without Christmas enlivenment: they offered a harlequinade with General Eisenhower as its captive star.

It was at the Café de la Paix, on its famous corner by the Opera, that the Skorzeny columns were supposed to meet. Security set an ambush with guns and tanks—but how could one distinguish between such colourable impersonators and real American troops, on leave or in transit, to whom the café terrace was a honey-pot? An eight p.m. curfew was enforced; Security hoped that Skorzeny's men would come careering into an empty capital; then they could be pounced on. Of course, if Skorzeny took the risk

* *A Soldier's Story.*

of coming in by day—or, a horrifying thought—if his troops were already there . . . So hundreds of disgruntled Americans were challenged on the Boulevards; to reach the Café de la Paix before curfew they had to run the gauntlet through cordons of M.P.s.

Civilian cars, also, had to be checked, and ironical French comments endured by patrols whose ears were already smarting from the abuse of G.I. drivers in a hurry; and as rumour added new weapons—plastic explosives, grenades fired from a pistol—to Skorzeny's reputed arsenal of terror, the inquiries became unceremonious.

And now General Eisenhower had a foretaste of the seclusion he was to suffer in the White House: report said that a "suicide squad" of at least three score Germans was heading for his home. "The story," he recalls, "was brought to me by a very agitated colonel who was certain that he had complete and positive proof of the existence of such a plot. He outlined it in great detail and his conclusions were supported by other members of the Security Staff."*

For months the Supreme Commander had motored about France and Belgium with only an officer or an orderly as escort. He had also been living a free and easy life in a villa (formerly occupied by von Rundstedt) at St. Germain, half an hour's drive from Paris.

Security were aghast at their past laxity; the general must at once move into the "compound" of Supreme Headquarters behind the cordons and patrols of Versailles with reserves near-by. In vain did Eisenhower argue that the Germans must have enough to do without sending troops far and wide looking for Allied commanders who could all, presumably, be replaced. Security did not share the Supreme Commander's views on his replaceability. Eisenhower had to pack and shift into the Trianon building at Versailles—if only "so that soldiers should be used on the battle-line and not in trailing me around".

Supreme Headquarters' own little D-day was described in the diary of Eisenhower's secretary and aide, Lieut. Kay Summersby.

"To say this report [of Skorzeny's imminent arrival] upset SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters] is pure understatement.

* *Crusade in Europe.*

"Security officers immediately turned headquarters compound into a virtual fortress. Barbed wire appeared. Several tanks moved in. The normal guard was doubled, trebled, quadrupled. The pass system became a strict matter of life and death, instead of the old formality. The sound of a car exhaust was enough to halt work in every office, to start a flurry of telephone calls to our office, to inquire if the boss was all right. The atmosphere was worse than that of a combat headquarters up at the front, where everyone knew how to take such a situation in their stride.

"The intended victim was the only officer at SHAEF unperturbed by the report. General Eisenhower had the war, the Bulge, to worry about; he couldn't be bothered by this one fantastic story.

"The staff insisted he move in from the von Rundstedt house, which was comparatively isolated from the Trianon. They pointed to the lonely, wooded stretches along the road; they emphasised the Germans knew every inch of that territory from their Occupation days. They said the General's security was impossible under such circumstances.

"Finally—only after his closest associates begged, as personal friends rather than staff officers, him to leave the von Rundstedt house—he reluctantly moved into the compound.

" 'But only so you'll forget about this damned business and get back to the war,' he growled.

"Security even asked General Eisenhower not to walk outside the office, for fear a sniper might have slipped through the toe-to-toe guard.

"We were prisoners, in every sense of the word.

"This new, personal tension, coupled with the flood of bad news and rumours from the Ardennes, left most of headquarters frankly apprehensive and depressed. Ike, the one solely responsible for the success or failure of our counterattack and therefore the only one entitled to the luxury of depression, had to smother his own feelings and act as the eternal optimist."

Next day the diary reported:

"Another night of uneasiness. E. is just pinned to his office all day; at night he goes upstairs and sleeps . . . I stay across the way from the office. Everyone's confined to the compound. What a life. . . .

"I lay awake for hours envisioning death and worse at the hands of S.S. agents. Sleep was impossible—with the tramp, tramp, tramp of heavy-booted guards patrolling our tin roof."

On December 22 the diary read:

"On our personal front Intelligence passed along a report the sabotage-assassins had made their way into Paris proper. It was said they would rendezvous at the Café de la Paix.

"This warning failed to bother the General. He came out of his office cell grumbling, 'Hell's fire, I'm going for a walk. If anyone wants to shoot me, he can go right ahead. I've got to get out!' "*

The stolen walk was in the courtyard of the buildings with guards all round.

Next day Eisenhower was allowed a visit from his naval aide, Capt. Harry S. Butcher. Butcher had got back only the night before to Paris, darkened and under curfew, after stopping at roadblocks all the way from the front. Hearing of his chief's isolation he drove out to see him, and his impressions of the prisoner of Versailles were recorded in a diary to which, like Lieut. Summersby, he confided "both high- and low-level views of the Ardennes attack".

"Saw Ike today. He . . . is thoroughly but hopelessly irritated by the restrictions on his moves. There are all sorts of guards, some with machine-guns, around the house, and he has to go to and from the office, led, and sometimes followed, by an armed guard in a Jeep. He seemed pleased to have someone to talk with like me, seemingly from the outer world."

This outer world was what Security meant to keep at bay. Shepherded to Versailles "for two or three days", Eisenhower found himself detained throughout Christmas week on one pretext and another, for Security were playing a double game. Unknown to the general, they were using a human decoy to trap Skorzeny: one Lieut.-Colonel Baldwin B. Smith, who was said to have the "Eisenhower look". Daily the colonel drove in the Supreme Commander's car between his house at St. Germain and Versailles, saluting with that quick flash for which "Ike" was known—and waiting for a bullet or a pistol-fired grenade.

It may be asked how Skorzeny's men were supposed to pene-

* *Eisenhower Was My Boss*, by Lieut. Kay Summersby; quoted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc., copyright 1948 by Kay Summersby.

trate the network in which Security had now enclosed their chief; a popular theory was that they would slip on M.P.s' brassards and escort Skorzeny—now in *German* uniform—to Versailles for interrogation. Did they have dog-tags? The question lost relevance since military police themselves were suspect.

On December 27 Eisenhower broke loose. He set off to take the train for Brussels like a schoolboy off to town—and found the Gare du Nord seething with armed troops and police.

"I sharply queried the Security officers about this use of men, but they assured me that they had merely assembled in the station individuals who were normally on duty in that vicinity.

"However, after we were well started on our journey I found that a squad of soldiers was accompanying me. At every stop—and these were frequent because of difficulties with ice and snowbanks—these men would jump out of the train and take up an alert position to protect us."*

Arrived at Brussels for his top-secret conference with Montgomery, Eisenhower ran straight into another flurry of precautions because a cavalcade of British staff cars headed by a red-tabbed Skorzeny was said to be driving through Belgium. Security did not breathe freely until they got their truant home.

Months after the Ardennes battle, M.P.s still carried Skorzeny's picture to compare with powerfully-built strangers of the killer type, while all the French police had a notice to say that this was a most dangerous man; he must be hunted down with prudence. Until the end of the war, perhaps to avoid alarming the public, Supreme Headquarters kept the story from the Press; then, with the Armistice, newspapers burst out with accounts of how "hand-picked assassins, led by the giant kidnapper, had been sent to murder Eisenhower." Skorzeny's arrest brought anticlimax; instead of thousands of English-speaking desperadoes, ranging far and wide, the total who went over the lines was finally agreed at—twenty-eight. Skorzeny himself questioned every soldier who got back; he is sure there were no more.

So there it is: a handful of half-trained, ill-equipped adventurers, seldom knowing where they were or what next they should do, were able to throw an enemy into turmoil and isolate

* *Crusade in Europe.*

its commander-in-chief. It was a success of almost alarming magnitude compared with the means employed—and Skorzeny was almost the last to hear of it.

On New Year's Eve he was receiving from Hitler the Mention clasp of the German Army for staving off front-line attacks in the Malmédy area during the crisis of December 18–28—the very week during which Eisenhower was held at Versailles for fear of him.

The summons to G.H.Q. (temporarily set up in a Rhineland forest for the Battle of the Bulge) saved Skorzeny's right eye; at the sight of his bandages Hitler sent him to his "court surgeon" and he spent several hours on the operating-table. It was in the sick-bay that an acquaintance, Dr. Rudolf Brandt, told Skorzeny how the Leader was now relying on drugs and injections to keep himself going. And the war going too, it seemed, for when Skorzeny got back to Hitler's room it was to hear him talking cheerfully of another big gamble in the South-East; although it was clear that he had played his last card, and lost. Others at headquarters referred vaguely to more wonder weapons just around the corner which might turn the tide.

Declining an invitation to the generals' mess—extended with rare condescension by Marshal Keitel—Skorzeny left to rejoin his brigade; he heard the chime of midnight bells as he passed through the wreckage of Cologne.

What might the New Year bring? This was a question no German dared ask on the first day of 1945, but it came up when Skorzeny reached his headquarters. Von Foelkersam was waiting for him, with a request that would not be denied. The brigade was being disbanded; up at Friedenthal there could be little scope in future for delicately balanced missions.

He asked for the command of the Eastern Task Force.

CHAPTER XI

> We know what our enemies would do to the German people if they could. They would enslave many millions and starve the rest. Our existence is at stake: the existence of our children and our children's children; everything that makes life worth living.
>
> Hitler's declaration at the turn of the year.

> Acceptance of the Morgenthau Plan (whereby Roosevelt and Churchill agreed at Quebec in the autumn of 1944 on the permanent division of Germany and her destruction as a modern industrial state after the war) was surely a monstrous and unmitigated mistake of statecraft. . . . It is impossible to escape the conclusion that many thousands of German soldiers decided that it was better to face death in battle than undergo the slower death by starvation which was the alternative the Morgenthau Plan seemed to offer.
>
> Professor William Hardy McNeill. *America, Britain and Russia*

Adrian von Foelkersam was the idealist in uniform that Skorzeny could never be: apologetic for others' failings; harsh towards his own; fretful only when he felt he might do more. He combined an inner intensity with the hawklike spirit of those Baltic vikings from whom his line had sprung: by habit he was gay, on principle uncaring, yet sometimes he would sit alone; then Skorzeny would be reminded of their first meeting.

An irascible young man, he had thought, when an unknown subaltern was ushered in during the early days at Friedenthal. Then the name and the decoration on the stranger's tunic brought to his mind a piece of quite insensate daring during the German advance into Russia: even then, the Knight's Cross was not easily

earned. The visitor, still scowling, stammered out his embassy. There were eleven of them, he said, ten brother officers and himself from the Brandenburg Division who wanted brisker work. What hope of joining these new commandos? When Skorzeny promised to see what he could do, the youngster's face cleared wonderfully.

It was over the transfer of this little group of officers that Skorzeny underwent that first and last interview with his Intelligence Supremo, Admiral Canaris. Beaten by this master of evasion, he and Radl changed their tactics and eventually smuggled in the eleven runagates by the backstairs. An age had passed since then: it seemed to both of them that Adrian had been always there—a third musketeer without whom no new venture was conceivable.

But that was just the point, said von Foelkersam in support of his petition; there were no new ventures in sight, and none was likely. The High Command would have no use for fancy troops and wild cat schemes in the short life left to Germany. To put it brutally, his present job as Skorzeny's chief of staff was a blind alley: high time he got back to regular soldiering, and since Friedenthal was seeking a new commander for their Task Force East—why not let him have the post?

Skorzeny was not deceived. Armies on both sides in the West had been left groggy by the Ardennes tussle, but in the East the Soviets had opened an offensive that was tumbling the defences before Berlin: his friend wanted the one battalion under Skorzeny's command most likely to be sent on the next stop-gap mission. But no one could hold von Foelkersam when there was something unpleasant to be done. He set off to the front as one on whom the gods had showered their choicest favours.

On January 18, Task Force East was at Hohensalza, with orders to hold the city to the last man. For centuries this junction of routes between Poland and Prussia had been disputed—now the Red Army were sweeping around it: what could a thousand men do in that human sea of enemies? Before the Russians closed on Hohensalza Skorzeny rushed in a few lorry-loads of munitions.

Three days later von Foelkersam radioed, "Position untenable". The problem was beneath the notice of the High Command; here, there and everywhere sacrificial stands were being demanded of

isolated units and battle-groups. Skorzeny felt it right to override an order which had become purposeless. He radioed "Break out to-night", hoping that some, at least, of the men might get through the Russian ring. A last radio message reported von Foelkersam had been badly wounded. Of all that picked battalion, there returned to Friedenthal two officers and three men. Von Foelkersam was not among them.

These last months of war took on a nightmare aspect for Skorzeny. Men whom he had trained in his single-minded fashion, men who had grown as close as brothers, had to be squandered on hopeless missions in a cause already lost. Nor was the task made easier for him because they went open-eyed and willingly to this unnecessary end.

[The author once heard Skorzeny refer to some of his special troops: "beautiful men", he called them, in the glowing assurance that he would be understood. These were the élite who always stepped forward: soldiers whose devotion transcended his own, since they could seldom be told where they were going. He had first been captivated by this spirit during the Mussolini search. Week after week his volunteers had waited in their camp: up to the very day of the Gran Sasso attack none of them except Karl Radl had any idea what lay before them—and even then were told only that few could hope to live through what was ahead. One mission after another confirmed his view that anyone can lead—since he knows where he is going—but it takes courage to follow a leap into the dark. Skorzeny insisted that this point be clear; and now the author's promise is redeemed.]

Perhaps the mission which troubled Skorzeny most deeply during this high season of contumacy was the attempt to salvage a "lost legion" from the depths of Russia. For months it clouded all his days and made his nights a torment; wherever his work took him he was pursued by it; his dislike for the harmless, necessary bureaucracy still turns to fury at the memory.

A telegram summoned him to Jodl's presence: he found Hitler's Chief of Operations with two officers in the red-striped trousers of the Staff, and at once divined from their solemnity that he was to be offered what Radl used to call "a specially important mission—one which it is specially important for the High Command to wash its hands of".

The guess proved right. An unwelcome problem had arisen from the stubbornness of a regimental commander, who had gathered up the pieces of a dozen broken units after the collapse of the central front in Russia. Twenty-five divisions had surrendered on the central front that summer in unimaginable catastrophe; whole regiments had thrown down their arms; yet this Lieut.-Colonel Scherhorn and his hybrid army remained in the field when the Red Armies had swirled on. German agents had radioed repeated reports of fighting. It seemed that Scherhorn still had some two thousand men under his command near Minsk, in the forests of White Russia, but the latest message said he could not hold out much longer. What could be done?

Skorzeny thought it out. Scherhorn had been cut off in June: now it was September. With three months gone and nothing done, it was too late for any action except the most precipitate—hence his telegram from Jodl. The whole affair was plainly an embarrassment to the High Command, who always believed that the best way to deal with embarrassments was to ignore them. One advanced, after all, or one retreated; well-geared machinery had always existed for both evolutions, but the generals had no technique for dealing with lost legions out of teleprinter range. Jodl anxiously asked whether Skorzeny would take over the responsibility. He could not refuse. For men like Colonel Scherhorn, and the troops who had stuck it out with him, no trouble was too much.

Flying back to Friedenthal, Skorzeny wondered at his own foolhardiness in taking on such a task when Germany herself faced the deluge. And yet, he thought, while such exemplary lunatics as Scherhorn struck out against the tide there would always be others ready to plunge in too. And if, by any thousandth chance, Scherhorn were to be saved, the rescue would lift spirits on every front and in every home in Germany.

An unlikely crew lined up at Friedenthal a few days later: heads roughly cropped, chins thick with stubble, they carried Soviet automatic pistols to go with their sacklike winter uniforms. Their papers, worn and greasy, tallied with the Russian names and units which each man rattled off. Only a clumsiness in the way that some of them thumbed black tobacco into scraps of newspaper and drew on these home-made cigarettes might have betrayed them.

Eight of the volunteers were Germans who, coming from the Baltic provinces, spoke Russian well. Twelve or fourteen more were Russians who had changed sides. The party were split up into four groups, each with a radio-man; one by one the groups would be dropped over the area, now hundreds of miles behind the Russian lines, where Colonel Scherhorn had been reported.

Group A took off at dusk. Five hours later their radio crackled out: "Poor landing. Enemy have seen us. Machine-guns firing." Then silence.

Group B went next. No signal this time, even to report their landing, until the fifth night. Then the decoding clerk called Skorzeny with a shout. Group B were safe—and they had found the lost army! Here was Colonel Scherhorn himself to radio his thanks.

Group C jumped next night to link up—like Group A, they vanished without trace. Group D followed. Failing to find Scherhorn, they worked their way home on foot. Again and again they were accepted as Russian soldiers; best of all was the night when their leader walked into a Red officers' mess and stayed to feast on roast goose and looted wine.

Skorzeny's elation at hearing from the lost legion was short-lived. He had banked on getting them out by air-lift after they had cleared runways in the forest; but Scherhorn's men were hungry and shivering in the rags of summer uniform; many were stricken with wounds or disease: they were too exhausted for heavy work. A doctor jumped to help and broke both legs. A second doctor landed safely and got a field hospital going, its equipment being delivered by air. Then an airfield expert parachuted: by the time they had cleared runways in a few weeks, the longer nights would lend cover for the rescue planes to land.

Planning was one thing, supply another. The lost legion wanted concentrated food, clothing, ammunition, stores—large stocks of everything hard to find—and the planes to carry them. After quarrelling with every Army branch in reach, Skorzeny got most of Scherhorn's needs: as they rained down, the lost army was built into a fighting force again.

But the throb of aircraft flying over every night attracted unwelcome attention to Scherhorn. Fresh attacks by Soviet troops drew off his strength and used up his supplies: how could air-

strips be built? Then at Friedenthal they had an inspiration. Some two hundred miles north of Minsk there stretched a region of lakes. If Scherhorn could fight his way there during the next few weeks, planes might lift his men straight off the ice—there would be no need for building runways.

A wave of hope excited the planners at Friedenthal. Scherhorn hailed the new scheme with delight—and a request for new cargoes of stores to put them on the road. Again the old bugbear: droves of Berlin officials had to be routed out and activated. More food was wanted, weapons, heavy clothing, a hundred things for every one of the two thousand. It was mid-November before Scherhorn's exodus began: blizzards were closing in. The few lorries they had were filled with wounded; all the rest plodded slowly in columns which wound their way across the white monotony of Russia: ten miles the first day—this was a burst of energy, for on the second day Scherhorn signalled only six. After that they seldom covered more than three or four miles each day. Sometimes fighting pinned them down: this meant Skorzeny must plead for more supplies to replace those expended. Most of his stocks fell wide and were lost.

Time rushed on. Emerging from the Battle of the Ardennes Skorzeny found his petrol for the supply flights reduced. He protested—it was cut again. The powers were implacable. Though huge dumps were being abandoned in the German retreat through Poland he had to fight for every drum of fuel. Radl, too, did his best, swearing that when the enemy broke into Berlin they would find an Everest of stores stamped "*Never* to be used".

Still the Russians rolled west, with Berlin tensed now for the onslaught. Skorzeny's freight-planes had to fall back to airfields deep in Germany; each flight was longer, each cargo smaller.

January came; still the Scherhorn columns crawled across the dimly-lit spaces, beating off attacks. In spite of his overwhelming exertions on the Oder battle-front, Skorzeny kept badgering Berlin for help to Scherhorn while he radioed him messages of false confidence—what else was there to do? Then came word that Scherhorn had joined up with the first group of parachutists who had been lost—and at last, on February 27, after fourteen weeks of travail, Skorzeny got the heart-lifting report he had waited for so long: the advance party were on the lakes!

At Friedenthal they were down to one supply trip by one plane a week—and now the petrol line was cut; they were destitute. There would be no more fuel: there *was* no more—Berlin's reply was final.

Another radio from Scherhorn: "Where are the planes? Send to fetch us. Hurry. We are running out of food."

The fragments of the lost legion met their unrecorded end. The leader of Group B, who found Scherhorn and led him to the lakes, was promoted, and his Knight's Cross, one of the last to be awarded, was dropped to him from the air. Thanks were signalled—but by whom?

This story, with its strange, quixotic gleam, is one of many which lit up for Skorzeny the opportunities behind the Russian lines. Equally, it pointed the penalty of failure. Nothing has been heard of Scherhorn's survivors: whether they starved and froze into the snow, where the Russians, the war being over, left them; or whether they were overwhelmed by the enemy, we do not know. There is a report that their leader was freed, broken in health, from a prison camp long after the war, but the rest are among the host of Germans cut off in Russia who have still to be accounted for.

Men of the type who parachuted down to organise the lost legion had a special gusto in their work: danger seemed to lure them on. Such secret missions were usually led by a German officer; one such, a youth of extraordinary daring, was Lieutenant (later Captain) Walter Girg, who passed and repassed the Soviet lines so often as to lose count. Radl used to say that Walter played his own version of Russian roulette, with five bullets in the revolver instead of the conventional one.

Girg took luck for granted and it never failed him. With his mild blue eyes, blond curls and lisping Austrian speech, only the unassailable fact that he had won two Iron Crosses and was not yet twenty-three induced Skorzeny to accept him as a volunteer. That was in 1944, late enough for heroics, but the newcomer at once became the *enfant terrible* of Friedenthal. "Moscow or bust" was plain common sense to Girg; Skorzeny had to take him severely in hand to stop him from overshooting the mark on almost every mission. Again and again he fell into preposterous

scrapes and came out smiling. If someone was wanted to test the indulgence of Providence under extreme provocation, Girg was the man.

His most famous success was in delaying the Red Army in Rumania while the Carpathian defences were taken up by the Germans; he was cited for helping to extricate a whole army corps from disaster. That was in August 1944, when the Balkan front had fallen in. No one knew what was going on. The Russians seemed to be everywhere.

Skorzeny then received this message from the High Command: "Form two special platoons for immediate operation to start from Temezvar airport, Rumania. The object is to bar the Carpathian mountain passes, reconnoitre behind the enemy, wreck his communications and help German civilians to safety."

A tall order, and to be fulfilled at a moment's notice. Skorzeny got together special troops, demolition experts, a dozen Russian-speaking commandos—and Walter Girg: just before take-off he sent over a scouting plane which returned with the news that Temezvar airport was in Russian hands. So they landed instead at an emergency field in Rumania and struck into the unknown: forty men against the invincible Red armies, trusting to their luck and to the Rumanian uniforms they wore. As a last touch red arm-bands were added to denote the change of allegiance since Rumania's armistice with Russia.

Girg had his party split into four. Each squad started by blocking the passes in its area—the Russian advance was thus slowed for several days. Then they concentrated on rescuing the old-established German colonies in Rumania; several hundreds were led out to safety. But it was left to Girg himself to pluck the rewards of supreme effrontery. His party ran into a Russian column —on their way, the comrades shouted, to occupy Kronstadt which the Rumanian Government had handed over to their new Soviet masters. Chanting: "Long live the Red Army: soon be the victory!" Girg's men led the march into Kronstadt with flowers, picked on the wayside, stuck in their rifles. Alight with wine and song, after much fraternal uproar in the town, they went on their way.

Later some of Girg's men came across a German anti-aircraft regiment, abandoned in the rout of armies, waiting to surrender.

The unit had the latest rapid-firing guns; the men, in perfect trim, might have left their depot an hour before. The two thousand gunners had not fired a shot—indeed, they had yet to see a Russian. Hundreds of them were shamed into joining in a break-through, and nearly all got home. Many such units yielded helplessly to the "Russian neurosis".

On his way back, after foraging over hundreds of miles to locate the Russian units, Girg, with four of his men, was trapped. Two were clubbed to death with rifle butts; Girg was being led out, stripped to the skin, for execution, when he broke away. The Russians chased him, shooting wildly. He fell wounded into a swamp and there sank out of sight. Next morning a naked man appeared at a German outpost, asking for the commander. Once more Girg had spun the revolver, fired, and won.

Before the debacle in Germany, Girg led a tank dash through the Russians in the north; again he had a mixed crowd of fifteen Germans and twenty-five Russians, all in the uniforms of the "Red" Rumanians. Using Danzig as a sally-port after East Prussia had been cut off, he broke through to the beleaguered garrison at Kolberg, along the Baltic coast. Skorzeny got a radio message from the garrison's commander who could not believe that Girg was really a German officer, still less that he had brought a group of tanks a hundred miles through the Russian lines. So he had arrested the whole party as spies and proposed to shoot them forthwith unless Skorzeny could vouch for their story. Skorzeny radioed to Kolberg just in time.

This Russian siege of Kolberg presented one of warfare's giddiest tergiversations. French soldiers enlisted in the S.S. Charlemagne Division fought to hold open a corridor through which German refugees were fleeing to the west. German Reds, prisoners of war enrolled in the Seydlitz Division, were battling to cut their compatriots' escape route.

Girg reached home only three men short, after a tour of four hundred miles in Soviet-held territory. His radio-operator, drowned when the ice broke as they were crossing the frozen Vistula, was buried in a cemetery with military honours and Soviet troops standing by. On their return Skorzeny handed out wrist-watches to Girg's Russians and was rewarded by their exuberant delight.

For his part, Girg admired the German civilians left behind by the ebbing German tide. Although terrified of the Red Army, they never denied him help: the women, especially, would take any risk if he showed them the Knight's Cross, won in Rumania, which he always wore under his scarf.

As the Russian flood widened and rushed onwards the scope for work behind the lines was greatly enlarged. A last effort was put into helter-skelter rescue missions of one kind or another; and not only on land, but down that artery of Central and South-Eastern Europe, the Danube.

Flowing through half a dozen countries, the Danube wound in and out of the fighting line. Skorzeny had a task force of sailors, intelligence experts and strong swimmers mobilised, as soon as the Russians reached the river, for a mimic naval war known as Operation "Trout". Soviet tankers were attacked with mines and explosive boats; frogmen blew up craft and bridges; in a few months some thirty thousand tons of shipping was sunk. And it was down the Danube that Skorzeny tried to send help to Budapest.

The months gained in the Balkans were running out. The Russians had crossed the Carpathians and broken into Budapest, where the Germans and their Hungarian allies still fought on. Skorzeny followed the battle news earnestly. He deplored this street-by-street destruction of one of Europe's fairest cities, and at the same time he was concerned for his friend and former senior officer in Russia, General Rumohr, who now commanded the armoured division caught inside the city.

Hitler's prestige was engaged in Budapest: he did all he could, even to sending down three more of his best tank divisions, to raise the siege. The Russian grip was too tight. The garrison seemed doomed—but at least the end could be staved off if they could have medical supplies and ammunition.

Skorzeny suggested the river route. One of the fastest freighters in Vienna was loaded with five hundred tons of stores and manned by a special crew, all Danube officers, who welcomed the chance of teaching the Russians a trick or two about "their" river. The journey took them twice through the Russian lines; then a sorry radio message reached Skorzeny—their ship had run

upon a sandbank. But the crew did not give up. One officer got to Budapest in a small boat; there he stole a motor-launch, and with it cargoes were repeatedly run through. A scouting party later found the freighter still on its sandbank: but before they got there the radio-man signed off with a message that the crew were all going down into Budapest to join the defenders.

The Battle of Budapest raged on for a full month. Then the garrison were ordered to break out. Of tens of thousands, a hundred and seventy reached safety. General Rumohr was wounded and Skorzeny heard later on that his friend had shot himself rather than fall into Russian hands.

CHAPTER XII

> The last great battle has begun. Enormous masses of troops, tanks and aircraft are being hurled against us in the East. The Russians are out for the final decision.
>
> Berlin Radio, January 12, 1945

> The salvos of triumph continue to boom nightly from Moscow and with abundant reason, for never in the history of war has so tremendous a military operation been undertaken in winter as that which is now sweeping on from victory to victory.
>
> *The Times*, London, January 25, 1945

For nearly two years Skorzeny had scarcely been a "soldier", as the word is normally understood: he had been a buccaneer, a military highwayman—a spectacular trapeze artist upon whose lone brilliance Hitler had counted to pull the show together.

And suddenly, in the last weeks of the war, when Germany was in extremity and the Russians were on their last lap to Berlin, Skorzeny was once more the man they turned to—but this time to do an ordinary soldier's job: the kind of thing he had not thought about since those days when he was a lieutenant in Russia. A lieutenant? Overnight he became a major-general—in all but rank and pay.

He was sitting in his Friedenthal office one evening at the end of January 1945 re-writing a report which some beribboned bureaucrat had called for—his first version had been returned as "too truthful". The telephone rang. It was Heinrich Himmler: now that Hitler classed most of his generals as dunces or traitors, Germany's head policeman had been turned into a generalissimo on the Eastern front and given command of "Army Group Vistula"—which was no longer an army group and nowhere near the Vistula. Indeed, its new commander sat in an office near

Berlin, and the front, if there were one, was but a couple of hours' drive away.

Himmler ordered Skorzeny to march "at once" with every soldier he could scrape up, to the River Oder, to a town called Schwedt which lay on the road towards Stettin, and there, from a bridgehead east of the river, he was to halt the Russian advance. Not merely was he to form a bastion which would save Berlin: he must establish a base from which the great counter-offensive Himmler had promised could be launched. From there two army corps would drive the Russians back: two army corps which did not yet exist.

It was five in the afternoon. From then on the telephone from Himmler's H.Q. was never quiet: "Have you started yet?"—"Why haven't you started yet?"—"We have already reported to Hitler that you have started"—and so on. Skorzeny got away at five next morning, with a parachute battalion under his command and four companies of his special troops—one of them a babel of Dutchmen, Belgians, Danes, Norwegians and even Swedes. He marched into the blue. No reports about Schwedt existed; nobody at Himmler's H.Q. or anywhere else knew where the Russians were.

On the road he learned by chance that the Russians as yet were some miles south of Schwedt near the Oder; he found the old town—its normal population about fifty thousand—sleepily inert with the flag still flying from the pile of the castle by the river. The long bridge over canal and river looked down on ice thick enough to bear an army. He sent patrols across it, to drive forward and seek out the Russian positions. Then he had time to think.

Around him and behind, all hope seemed to have gone. On the roads—retreat, rout, panic: the sad stream of refugees, the straggling remains of a defeated army. Ahead: a triumphant enemy surging on through a "defence" that was broken and numb. In his rear: capricious and hysterical leaders whose plans were fantasy; a commissariat whose stores and armouries were empty.

From this slough of moral and material penury he had to stop the Russians. There was only one thing to do: he must himself turn fantasy into a weapon: create, on his side of the front, through sheer will and example, a resistant force by recruiting and inspiring

every man and woman who came his way able to use rifle or shovel; and on the enemy side, produce an illusion of strength by immediately taking the offensive, by attacking all the time here, there and everywhere and chopping off the heads of the Russian columns as they appeared.

Improvise, invent: hoodwink yourself and everybody else. As for the rear: lull the leaders with promises, and refrain from looking over your shoulder.

He had, in fact, to pit his own personality, drive and imagination against the twin enemies of chaos here and a powerful, victorious enemy over there.

First, what forces had he to build upon? Besides the troops which he had brought with him, he found in Schwedt—

One reserve battalion, so called, of five hundred ill or ageing men;

About a hundred and fifty N.C.O.s and officer-cadets who happened to be in Schwedt on a course;

A handful of pioneer men able to handle a rifle, perhaps, but not to march;

The sick and wounded and stranded, left behind when weeks ago all fit men had been swept away to other fronts.

But an unheeded source of fighting manpower quickly became apparent to him: the procession of stragglers which wormed into the town from the east. Skorzeny's first step, after pricking out a perimeter for his bridgehead—an arc of tactical posts within about four miles of the town—was to gather up these stragglers as they trooped in and put them to train under the efficient N.C.O.s he had found there.

His second step was to enlist not only the labour of the civilians but also their enthusiasm. He did not say to the mayor and Party officials: "Get the people out with pick and shovel"; he said: "Go out yourselves with pick and shovel, and the people will go with you." By the second day the population believed—because Skorzeny had told them and shown them—that they could save Germany, that upon them the safety of their friends and relations in the rear depended, that they were the rock against which the Russian wave would break.

To Himmler in Berlin the Oder had seemed on the map a natural barrier before the capital. Skorzeny found it was no ob-

stacle at all: ice-breakers and dynamite were needed before the river could make a tank obstacle; and before the marshland between canal and river could be flooded.

Very soon he felt that his bridgehead, with its outer perimeter of strongposts covering every approach and its inner ring of defences dug by his labour force, was strong enough to delay the invaders for at least a few days: until he had collected and trained a sizable garrison and could back it with something like the right kind of weapons.

He kept all his best officers and N.C.O.s in the town—a few had to be detached to deal with refugees and the evacuation of women and children—to train his new and hourly growing "army"; within three days two complete battalions had been formed, fit to man part of the inner ring.

Meanwhile, aggressive patrols were day and night sallying thirty or forty miles deep into Russian-held country, taking Russian advance guards by the throat and bringing back hourly reports of enemy movement. At the same time, inside the bridgehead and coiled, as it were, like a strong spring, a picked striking force was held ready to attack any Russian column which advanced so far and thus to prevent a break-in from becoming a break-through.

Orders of an irrelevant and—to the man on the spot—absurd kind kept arriving from Army Group. These Skorzeny could at some risk ignore; but he could not ignore his shortage of weapons, particularly artillery, and the neglect of H.Q. to answer his requests for supplies. Told that no anti-tank guns were available, he would not leave it at that—if Berlin could not give him any, he would find some for himself. And he did: from a factory thirty miles to the south which Berlin had written off because it was within range of the Russian guns he collected an invaluable number of 75-mm. guns—the only kind which could knock out the T34 and Stalin tanks. And at a dump near Frankfurt-on-the-Oder his men got as many of the special Mark 42 machine-guns as they wanted.

Skorzeny made up his lack of field artillery by collecting some anti-aircraft guns which he mounted on lorries. Two Home Guard battalions had been added to his force. One came from Hamburg: dockers and stevedores who, tough Communists

until about 1936, were now to fight like lions against the Russians. The other had been raised for the defence of Königsberg, some eight miles to the south-east; Skorzeny now felt strong enough to hold this town as an advanced strongpost. Here his paratroops and the two Home Guard contingents would take the first Russian shock before falling back through the bridgehead's outer ring.

Hermann Göring rang up: "How is it going?" From the first he had taken a benevolent interest in the bridgehead, and frequently telephoned. "I could do with some more troops", Skorzeny answered. Next day a brand-new battalion of the Hermann Göring Division arrived, commanded by an eager and much-decorated young officer. They were fine troops—except that, being airmen, they had no notion of an infantryman's job. So, to the dismay of their commander, Skorzeny split them into groups which he scattered among his own units—and infantrymen they became in no time.

One day, driving round his bridgehead, Skorzeny came upon a troop of cavalry, smart and well-mounted on well-cared-for horses—like something out of a romantic film. The subaltern in command trotted up to him and saluted. "Can you use us, sir?" "You bet I can," he answered—delighted, but wondering what on earth might turn up next.

As the days became a week, his motley army had reached division strength: fifteen thousand men or so speaking almost every tongue in Europe—he had Russians and Rumanians now, as well as the Westerners he had brought up with him from Friedenthal. "My European Division", he called it.

Time had been won; but the Russian attack must come soon. One morning he sent out a small patrol to look at Bad Schonfliess, a small watering-place beyond Königsberg: they came under fire, and lost two dead. That afternoon Skorzeny went out himself. Towards dusk he and his men left their vehicles on the outskirts of Bad Schonfliess and crept to the fringe of deserted houses. Three civilians lay in the road; one was a woman.

A solitary civilian appeared—but still no sign of Russians. The enemy had arrived two days earlier, the man said—they were at the railway station at the other end of the town: troops and munitions were arriving all the time. Skorzeny's patrol worked

their way through the dark town: there were the Russian tanks, fifty of them, outside the station. No time to waste—back through the silent streets. He waited long enough to tell the townspeople to go back to Königsberg, only five miles away. But two days of Russian occupation seemed to have deadened their will. The patrol drove back to Schwedt with a few German children who had lost their parents; no one else would leave the doomed town.

The Russians struck. Forty tanks and several battalions drove into Königsberg. Fighting house by house, Skorzeny's men destroyed ten tanks in their retreat—a fighting retreat which proved that even the freshly raised Home Guards would hold.

After a night of battle Skorzeny returned to Schwedt to be greeted by the commander of the Königsberg Home Guard—his soldiers were still in the thick of the fight.

"I've been waiting all night, Colonel, to report that all's lost in Königsberg," the fellow cried; and Skorzeny promptly put him under arrest.

He was the Nazi Party boss in Königsberg who, as such, automatically commanded the Home Guard. Palpably he had deserted in the face of the enemy: Skorzeny had him court-martialled and hanged him in the public square.

This reached the ears of Martin Bormann, Hitler's Party deputy, who from his Berlin office sent a furious message claiming that senior Party members could be tried only by a Party tribunal.

Skorzeny told Bormann's emissary: "We tried your man not as a Party official but as a soldier—but are not cowardice and desertion punishable in Party leaders too?"

Skorzeny did not care a fig for the Party, if it interfered with his military duty or intentions. He showed this a second time during this same battle. An order, again from Bormann in Berlin, said he was at all costs to seize or destroy a couple of vehicles stranded fifteen miles behind the Russian lines—they contained vital "State papers". Skorzeny inquired further: these were no State papers—they were Party papers from Bormann's own office, documents which Bormann for personal reasons did not want to reach Russian hands.

So he replied that he would not waste men on such a mission: the order could not be obeyed.

Ten days after the bridgehead was formed, came a welcome

addition to his force: Lieutenant Schwerdt, who had been with him for the rescue of Mussolini, and a first-rate company of commandos—among them ten of his own veterans who had also dropped with him at the Gran Sasso.

Königsberg was abandoned; the bridgehead was withstanding a crack Russian army corps headed by a great weight of tanks and supported by Sovietised Rumanians. The enemy was held on the perimeter: but numbers of advanced posts had been given up.

It was then that Skorzeny nearly got himself court-martialled for flouting Himmler himself. A village had been abandoned on Skorzeny's orders; Himmler signalled: "Is the company commander concerned being court-martialled or has he already been shot?" Skorzeny replied that he had taken no action; nor would he. Then he drove to the front where a Russian break-through had to be stopped.

Another message: Skorzeny would report to Himmler's H.Q. at four that afternoon. He put it in his pocket—and, after driving back the enemy, reported to his army group commander four hours late. Himmler was raging: court-martial, reduction to the ranks, mutiny—he stormed threats and accusations at Skorzeny.

Skorzeny told him that, firstly, he himself had ordered that the village should be abandoned, and that secondly, ever since he had been at Schwedt he had received a stream of nonsensical orders but never an ounce of supplies.

This seemed to shake Himmler into reasonableness. "Tell me about your bridgehead," he said to Skorzeny—and asked him to dinner. By the time the meal was over, Himmler had given him an assault-gun battery and promised all possible help.

The battle for the bridgehead raged; villages changed hands; there were withdrawals. But Skorzeny knew that he could hold. He felt so secure there that he told himself he would "grow old and grey" in Schwedt; and he was at least prolonging the life of Berlin and giving thousands of refugees time to reach shelter in the West.

A signal at his advanced H.Q.: Göring was in Schwedt, waiting to see him. Actually—a big shot had come to his bridgehead: the first visitor he had had the whole time! Göring in plain field-grey: without medals, his belly somewhat shrunken, no bluster or blather this time. He arrived during a severe battle.

The grand Panjandrum wanted to go into the bridgehead: so he should, but not, his entourage nervously hoped, where there was much risk. Göring was jolly to all, doling out cigarettes and brandy. He went with Skorzeny almost up to the front line. Then he left, his duty accomplished, and his curiosity appeased.

The battle continued, but the bridgehead held. Skorzeny had done his job—the job of an orthodox, text-book divisional commander.

Then he remembered—he had never found time to fill up the lengthy forms which would have brought him the appropriate rank of major-general. The B.B.C. did it for him: just before his recall to Berlin. "The well known S.S. chief Skorzeny," the broadcast from London went, "who carried out Mussolini's rescue, has been promoted major-general and charged with the defence of Berlin. He has thus become the most powerful man in the German capital. . . . He has already started to liquidate all unreliable elements in the Berlin population."

Skorzeny was tickled by the bulletin; it reminded him of the night before his Gran Sasso rescue when the B.B.C. had transported Mussolini from Italy to North Africa on the radio waves to nonplus his would-be liberators. It seemed an eternity ago, and here they were, still at it. Now Skorzeny was to be used as a bogeyman in some game of "political warfare". He was hugely amused; no sixth sense warned him how this cloud on the horizon no bigger than a man's hand presaged a storm which would burst over his head.

He left Schwedt at the end of February on orders from General Jodl, who had been directed to give him a still more important and secret task. A few days later his successor in command was ordered to evacuate the bulk of his troops. Their stand had served its purpose.

CHAPTER XIII

Where there is much light there is also much shadow
—GOETHE: *Goetz von Berlichingen*

WITH his recall from Schwedt, the life Skorzeny knew was almost over. After the rigours of the Oder bridgehead it was back to work at Friedenthal; desk work which he found more and more unreal as his special forces were thrown into breaches made in the defence by enemies who might be stayed but not in the long run stopped.

One last stupendous mission was entrusted to him, but first there came about the dissolution of most of the front line battalions under his command: von Foelkersam had been right; no one would have time for "fancy troops" in the last spasm of Germany's life. The generals were left in possession of the stricken field.

Some days later they had second thoughts: when the American First Army, by luck and drive, had reached Remagen and seized intact the great Ludendorf bridge.

"Send for Skorzeny," came the cry from G.H.Q.

Already the Americans had driven a bridgehead six miles deep across the Rhine: "The traditional defensive barrier to the heart of Germany was pierced," writes General Eisenhower. "This was one of my happy moments of the war. The final defeat of the enemy . . . was suddenly, now, in our minds, just round the corner."*

As at Nymegen six months before, the High Command did everything they could with bombers, tank columns, and long-range guns to recapture or destroy the bridge; then Skorzeny was told to send his frogmen in. For the first time he refused to obey an order unconditionally. Each man of the group he brought up from his Danube training-centre must make up his own mind, when the hopelessness of the task had been explained to him, whether he would take it on or not.

* *Crusade in Europe.*

The water, he told them, was only a few degrees above freezing; the whole area was fully manned and gunned by the enemy. Searchlights were playing over the approaches to the bridge—the Americans expected just such an attack. There was practically no chance of coming back alive and still less of the enterprise succeeding. Now would they volunteer?

They did. A few survivors were hauled out by their American captors. The bridge remained.

All that was left to Skorzeny was to rage at the dull idiocy of the orthodox; given a delicate weapon whose edge was tempered for surprise, they had once again used it in a tardy frontal attack. He saw his band of swimmers go to their fate in the icy, bloodied waters of the Rhine; then he drove to Berlin: for once the muddlers would share his shame.

While Skorzeny was waiting in the bomb-blasted Chancellery to report to the High Command he was greeted, on Hitler's behalf, by a young woman. She was fair-haired, pleasant-looking—a suburban figure among the marble wreckage. She told Skorzeny she had heard so much of him. "You must come to tea soon and tell us about some of the things you have done," she said. A month later her marriage to Hitler was retrieved from banality by death. She was Eva Braun.

Hitler was now living his last tortured days and nights in a bomb-proof suite alongside the Chancellery. Once, coming out for a conference, he saw Skorzeny and stretched out hands that trembled. This man who was holding Germany on the road to self-destruction by his single will was bent, shaky and old.

"Skorzeny," he said. "I have not yet thanked you for your stand on the Oder. Day after day it was the one bright spot in my reports. I have awarded you the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross; and I mean to hand them to you myself. Then you can give me a full account. For the future, I have other work for you. . . ."

He shuffled on. Skorzeny did not see him again.

The Chancellery was still peopled with illusions: it was a stage scene in a heap of ruins. Guards of honour presented arms; generals squabbled about Orders of the Day and bits of ribbon.

Everyone who was anyone gathered in the shadows of Hitler's world: even Hanna Reitsch—she was lying ill in a shelter when

Skorzeny found her. "I can still fly," she whispered. "I can replace an airman. I shall soon be in the thick of it again."

Hanna had her way, as usual. Soon after, when Russian guns and troops ringed the capital, she landed an aeroplane in a cratered avenue. Hitler had asked her to fetch General Ritter von Greim, whom he had appointed to replace Göring as commander-in-chief of an extinct Air Force. Greim was wounded on this wild flight; but four days later he was packed off again with orders to arrest Himmler, accused of contacting the Allies. Again, Hanna Reitsch was in the cockpit, skimming the roofs and treetops of the capital to avoid the shell-bursts.

Twenty-four days were left for Hitler when Skorzeny bade farewell to Berlin, but no issue except victory could be mentioned. Nations which have never lost a war, peoples who have never known invasion, could not understand why German soldiers went on fighting; Skorzeny himself hardly knew what drove him on as he tried to reassemble the remnants of his task forces to prepare their last stand against a world in arms.

For such was the final mission that was given him. Centred on the Eagle's Nest, Hitler's aerie on the Austro-German border, twenty or thirty divisions of troops were to be welded into a hoop of steel around the Leader. Behind their snowy mountain wall, in caverns, tunnels and ravines they had armouries and stocks of food; they would hold out, if need be, for years. Skorzeny was ordered to go ahead of the main garrison and create the nucleus of a "Corps for the defending of the Alps".

He drove from doomed Berlin to take up the Wagnerian assignment. But first he visited Vienna in the hope of finding some of his own units which were stranded on the crumbling south-east front; and drawn there, too, by a desire to see again his home.

He drove at dusk into a darkened city. Not a lamp was lit; the empty streets were thick with smoke from smouldering buildings. Now and then a shadow crept along the broken walls; there was distant gunfire. Along the littered Danube quays he sought the house where his brother had lived—its ruins blocked the street. His mother's house was wrecked; one of her neighbours crept out to tell him that she had left Vienna a few days before.

A great silent hulk of a capital: barricades, with no troops to

man them; abandoned German tanks; a death-like silence, cracked only by sudden rifle shots, quite near. Once or twice he must have driven across the lines, even though there was no "front". At an apparently deserted barricade he stopped his car to look round. Two figures emerged from the shadows: policemen. They introduced themselves: "We are the garrison—the Russians are just over there." Vienna had lost everything except her humour.

Skorzeny found his old office. No light, no telephone, no gas. But his partner and girl secretary were still there; they made tea over an oil-stove, and talked by candle-light. As the Russian tanks sounded still nearer, some of his old workmen appeared: "I hope you get away, sir. And think of us."

It was time to go—yet he must first see his own house in Peter Jordan Street. The gardens were ghostly, as they might have seemed in his childhood. He went from room to room; everything as he remembered it—the rugs his wife had loved, the silver they had bought together, the familiar pictures. The clocks had stopped at different times. He left all as it was, for the Russians to move in.

Now for the command post—what would be happening at the Castle? Along the road into Vienna there had been signs of precipitate retreat, even of panic. But deep in the Castle dungeons such notions were not entertained. Against a setting of baronial luxury, Baldur von Schirach, district leader of Vienna and former paladin of Hitler Youth, sat beneath gilded chandeliers alive with dozens of candles, gazing at a chart.

"I suppose you know," Skorzeny ventured, "that the Russians can march in just when they want—indeed, they're doing so now."

"Ridiculous!" Von Schirach was huddled over his map. "My two S.S. divisions will attack from the north; I shall close my pincers from the west. Thus shall we liberate Vienna as Prince Stahremberg liberated her from the Turks in 1683." Skorzeny left him: playing his ghostly game, manœuvring his phantom armies. "Here I shall fight and die," were von Schirach's parting words.

On Skorzeny's way north he signalled to Hitler's H.Q.: "In my opinion Vienna will be lost today"—it was not his domain, but he had been told to report matters of importance direct. He got no reply.

Then on to the Alpine redoubt from whose icy walls Hitler would defy the world. Radl joined him at their new headquarters near Radstadt; soon after came a courier from beleaguered Berlin: his Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross!

Next, a surprising embassy from Dr. Walther Funk, who had stepped into Dr. Schacht's shoes as President of the Reichsbank and Minister of Economics. He sent two of his officials to ask whether he might put the State Treasure—and his own person—under Skorzeny's protection. The answer was a short one: among the things Skorzeny needed for the task before him were neither a civilian Minister nor a fortune in gold and jewels.

The castles of the Alpine redoubt were Hitler's airiest imposture. Skorzeny and Radl searched the region and found it innocent of war. A few horse-drawn carts were climbing the roads with provisions: machines were lying about, waiting to be installed—they had been brought from the factories which were supposed to be transferred to make it a self-contained stronghold. But the underground armouries were empty; the storerooms were bare. It was the last dream to vanish with the awakening: there was nothing to fight with; and nothing they could do.

April 30: Hitler was dead. So much for the Alpine Redoubt . . . So much for Germany. Looking across the empty mountains, Skorzeny heard six days afterwards that the war was over. An air force officer offered to fly him with some friends to Spain. Skorzeny refused; he must see to the surrender of his men; the last orders had to be given.

With Radl and a few others, he went to a mountain hut and set about trying to get into touch with the nearest Allied headquarters. Mountain people said, to his astonishment, that American troops in the area were searching the countryside for him, and in the course of the hunt arresting dozens of disarmed German officers and soldiers. It was only now that he began to suspect the warped aspect of the renown he enjoyed with the Allies; he learned that for months "wanted" posters with his photograph had been displayed in France. So he sent three letters saying he wanted to give himself up; how and where should he surrender? No reply came from the Americans; it appeared that they regarded his approaches as a ruse.

Waiting for something to happen, in the sudden repose that

"peace" brought, the group around Skorzeny began to talk of the future, of the consequences of peace. In the snow and sunshine it was like an unexpected holiday: a few days without cares, and each seemed endless.

They discussed the ideas which the end of war brought to many minds. And they seemed to arrive at agreement: that the time for narrow national states had passed. Europe, they decided, was the smallest stage on which all, friend or foe of yesterday, could meet. The European idea must grow naturally out of the chaos.

But if in the rare, cleansing air of the mountains such sentiments could unfold, the spirit of trustfulness was not yet abroad below. Luxemburg Radio, the new mouthpiece of the conquerors, began appealing to one and all, "good" Germans as well as Allies, to help lay by the heels the leader of a murderous conspiracy—Otto Skorzeny. Newspapers took up the hue and cry: "The most diabolically clever man in Germany is still free. He is being hunted everywhere by the top brains of Allied Intelligence."

A sardonic turn of events; away from all the bulletins and head-lines, the subject of them was doing his best to give himself up. At last, Skorzeny, Radl and two more officers, descended to the plains. It was ten days after Germany's surrender. Armed and smartly uniformed, they sought out the nearest American command post, there to give up their weapons and take their places in a prisoner-of-war camp with their men.

It was not to be so easy. For once Skorzeny had forgotten the numbing effect of surprise. The last thing which the Allies expected was that Otto Skorzeny, prototype of cunning and treachery, who was to be looked for behind any disguise and brought to bay only after desperate resistance, would walk up to them and say, "Here I am".

They found an American depot. The sergeant at the desk shook his head: to him Skorzeny's name happened to mean nothing; and he was too busy to book in prisoners. But he could provide a Jeep to take them to Salzburg; there, if they liked, they could talk about surrender at Divisional H.Q.

Such was Skorzeny's introduction to the informality of Germany's new masters. The driver of the Jeep, a Texan, had heard the name all right. "Skörzeny, is it?" He pulled up at a tavern

and they bought a bottle of wine: "If you're Skorzeny you'd better take a drink. Tonight you'll hang."

In Salzburg, however, the Texan left them alone, still armed, outside an American-occupied hotel; that was the last they saw of him. Again, the strange nonchalance: it was lunchtime—not till office-hours could anyone worry about conspiracy and murder.

At last a U.S. major sent them elsewhere, still armed, to pick up "orders"—but the orders, when obtained, had to be signed in yet another town.

And then it must have dawned on someone that here, right among them, stood the man who was being hunted all over Western Europe: 6 feet 4 inches of him and a pistol in his holster. Skorzeny was ushered into the dining-room of a villa and asked to sit down for a chat with a brace of American officers. In a trice the three doors and all the windows were flung wide from outside: machine-guns covered him from every direction: Skorzeny was captured!

The Americans were no longer casual. Quickly he was disarmed, searched to the skin and bundled with Radl and another German officer into Jeeps—one German to each Jeep. Fore and aft of the convoy an armoured car, its guns trained on the Jeeps. A military policeman held his automatic pressed to Skorzeny's heart.

Thus they were driven back to Salzburg during the night. They stopped before a house with all its windows ablaze. A swarm of guards fell upon them and bound their arms behind their backs; and Skorzeny was led alone to the first floor. The scene was set: two American officers with an interpreter formed a kind of tribunal; opposite, in a row of chairs, the audience. On either side of Skorzeny stood two armed policemen, watching his every movement.

The spectators, he discovered, were war correspondents and cameramen in uniform. He was blinded by exploding flashlights.

"Skorzeny certainly looks the part," wrote a New York woman reporter that night, with a verbal shudder. "He is striking in a tough way; a huge powerful figure. The Beast of Belsen is something out of a nursery in comparison." She added for her readers: "He has blue eyes."

"It was thought best," a message published in a London news-

paper ran, "to keep Skorzeny with his hands manacled behind his back. When he was given a cigarette, it was lit and he had to have the ash shaken off for him. A glass of water was held to his lips."

Chicago read next day that the interview ended "with a clicking of pistols as the M.P.s prepared for what might happen next". And the *Daily News* reporter wound up: "I'll say this. He was a true Nazi throughout. He walked out with his head high—and with a flock of American soldiers wishing he would make just one dash for freedom."

Now for the questions—and an irritating delay. The prisoner said he would not answer while he was manacled; he also complained that his wrist watch had gone. This was the one inscribed for him by Mussolini—and for months to come Skorzeny was kept busy saving it from souvenir-hungry G.I.s.

The watch was restored, the handcuffs—after telephoned appeals to "Security"—were removed; Skorzeny walked to the window, chancing a bullet in his back, and shouted to Radl who had been held with his companion down below: "Are you two still manacled?"

Radl replied "Yes", whereupon Skorzeny said their hands must also be freed before he would speak. Again he got his way, aided by the manifest anxiety of the reporters to get down to business.

And now the cause of the "Wanted" posters, radio appeals, the congregation of the Press at Salzburg, was revealed to him by the first question: "Why did you try to murder General Eisenhower?"

Skorzeny said: "I didn't," and inquired how the suggestion had arisen.

The reporters had come a long way to get the "inside story"; they were in no humour for prevarication, and here was the First Murderer saying that he knew nothing of the plot; nor could he be shaken on it. A cool customer, was the impression they gave next day to the world's Press—and, of course, not for a moment to be believed. The *New York Times* man could hardly be blamed for begging the whole question in a bland sentence: "Handsome despite the scar that stretched from ear to chin, Skorzeny smilingly disclaimed credit for leading the mission to murder members of the Supreme Command."

Asked to prove, in the teeth of the statements from Security, that he had never harboured any such intentions, Skorzeny replied with an infuriating show of reasonableness: "If I had ever been ordered to attack Allied G.H.Q., I should have made a plan to do so. If I had made a plan, I would have carried it out. And no one would have been left in doubt of what I was trying to do."

To Skorzeny this seemed simple logic; his disillusioned audience thought otherwise. Even the *Christian Science Monitor's* correspondent cabled home that the prisoner had "an aggressive personality to go with his physical equipment—and", he added tartly, "a mind adapted to subversive activity."

Skorzeny and Radl spent that night together. They sat on a bench with their hands tied behind them and under the eyes of guards who kept their fingers on the triggers of their guns. Next day they were driven north to Augsburg with four other prisoners. Three were German generals. The fourth was Dr. Ley, Hitler's Labour Minister, who faced the future in sky-blue pyjamas, a huge cloak, carpet slippers and a round Tyrolean hat.

Next day Skorzeny was questioned by Colonel Henry Gordon Sheen, Eisenhower's very able chief of Counter-Intelligence, who had hurried down from Versailles at the news of the "capture". They spent six hours together. Sheen was upset, at first, by the prisoner's insistence that he had not even crossed the lines in the Ardennes, for several witnesses had "positively" seen him. But in the end he was convinced—and told Skorzeny so—that the Americans had been led on a wild-goose chase; faces at Supreme Headquarters would be red. Just before leaving, though, Sheen put a last, sudden question:

"What were you doing in Berlin at the end of April?"

Nonplussed, Skorzeny said he was not there.

"Come now," Sheen urged, bringing all his technique as an interrogator into play, "you know perfectly well that you yourself flew Hitler out of Berlin on April 30. Where did you take him?"

Skorzeny could only say that he had not been in Berlin since the tenth of April—and went on to prove his alibi. Sheen believed him in the end; but the story that Skorzeny whisked Hitler out before Berlin fell became as durable as the legend of Eisenhower's escape from his clutches. He was to be asked the sudden question

posed by Sheen, not scores but hundreds of times—by G.I.s and generals, by journalists and judges, by Englishmen, Frenchmen, Russians and anyone else who got the chance to ask it. It pops out to this day: "Where did you leave Hitler, really?"

Skorzeny can think of no better answer than the argument he offered Colonel Sheen: "I'm sure Hitler is dead. And anyway, if I *had* taken him somewhere to safety, why, in heaven's name, would I have come back to surrender?"

Sheen saw the sense in that, but many other faces have betrayed a quizzical doubt which Skorzeny reads like this: "I wonder! After dropping Hitler somewhere, couldn't this fellow have returned to Germany just to throw the Allies off the scent?"

The fact is, of course, that Skorzeny had become a figure in modern mythology; he was capable of anything, from infanticide to disappearing in a cloud of brimstone through the floor. A week after Colonel Sheen's visit to Augsburg, General Walter Bedell Smith, Supreme Headquarters Chief of Staff, thought he would kill the myth. He went to the Scribe Hotel in Paris, where Allied correspondents nested, and took the penitent's stand with a "top-level retraction". There was not, he said; there never had been, an Eisenhower murder plot. The security staff had confused various reports. It was a Snafu.

War correspondents are used to Snafus, a cynical abbreviation which may be interpreted as Situation-Normal-All-Fouled-Up; but this was a most aggravating one. What of the official "releases" on the plan to attack Allied leaders? reporters asked. All withdrawn, the general said. Pained questions were put by journalists who had accepted the statement on Skorzeny's mission behind the lines and added "colour" of their own—how would they explain this upset to their editors? And then, they had got corroboration in the Security stampede. Was it not true, for instance, that a "double" of Eisenhower's had used his car while he was imprisoned at Versailles? General Bedell Smith blinked at the reminder; having to justify this impersonation when his Supremo came to hear of it can have been no pleasant task.

The Press went off disgusted: denials were a bore; there *must* be something in a story so circumstantial—and Skorzeny's custodians thought so too. He went from one grilling to another; from a second prison to a third and a fourth and a fifth. In the sixth he

shared a hut with Field-Marshal Kesselring; then there was a seventh and an eighth. And each time the questions would start all over again.

May 19: Wiesbaden prison: locked in a hut with Dr. Kaltenbrunner, one of the chiefs of the Secret Service: it was obvious to both that hidden microphones were to record their chatter about State secrets. The couple talked interminably of university days; and also they discovered the scraping of boots on the floor was a means of further exacerbating the ears of listeners.

Life, for one of Skorzeny's disposition, still had its amusing moments—or could be made to: one when he took charge of an interrogation and became, so to speak, his own film director.

"Two very smart American guards," he recalls, "took me to a room where sound-film cameras were mounted. A captain and an interpreter were sitting at a table. Then the fun started: just as if a real entertainment film were being shot—except that the star was the only participant not being paid for his performance. After an hour and a half things were still not going right, so I suggested we should rehearse each scene first—go through the questions and answers beforehand. We did: the final shooting was a great success." And he adds, with enjoyment, "I have heard of no other prisoner who had a sound-film made of his own interrogation, and directed it himself."

The round went on—interviews with a British secret service chief and a Frenchman. "Waited on" by a Filipino G.I. who must have been reading *Stars and Stripes* with its colourful descriptions of the "giant kidnapper"—he would drop Skorzeny's food-tray on the threshold and vanish like a flash of his own native lightning.

A red code-mark on the card outside his cell meant: THIS MAN IS DANGEROUS.

June 21: "Get Skorzeny ready"—three American generals were waiting in the office to see him. But the wooden hut he lived in was an oven in the summer heat: he was in pyjamas. "Go as you are," advised a friendly sergeant, "and let them see what it's like." Geniality from the generals. Whisky. Apologies—promise of a change. He is moved with ceremony to the local prison: bombed out, and verminous.

The ultimate luxury: admitted by an amiable guard to a small door in the corridor labelled "Americans Only". The ultimate

misery: another warder, not so amiable, removed his straw palliasse for the night.

More questionings of the military sort—straightforward, increasingly polite. On August 11 at Oberursel Karl Radl is allowed to share his cell: release to an ordinary prisoner-of-war camp must surely be near. "Get Skorzeny ready": handcuffs again; then—Nuremberg.

September 10: A real V.I.P. trip, this one, in an aeroplane. Fellow-guests include Grand-Admiral Dönitz; General Guderian, sometime Chief of Staff; Minister Ley of the sky-blue pyjamas—and, surely, Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach, whose last words to Skorzeny in Vienna had been: "Here I shall fight and die." Star actors in the unprecedented, unrehearsed drama of the War Crimes Trials which was about to be produced before a world audience.

At the gates of Nuremberg prison it was noticed that Dönitz and Skorzeny still wore their shoulder badges; so each in turn ripped off the other's last vestige of rank.

Across the passage Göring nodded cheerfully through the trap of his cell door. Gaunt Rudolf Hess, always handcuffed to his escort, was seen at exercise in the prison yard.

Two suicides—Dr. Ley's was one—induced a rule that prisoners must sleep, if sleep they could, under a blinding light and with their faces towards the door.

Interrogation again: by a man worth talking to, General "Wild Bill" Donovan, of the Office of Strategic Services, Skorzeny's nearest equivalent in the U.S. Army.

After ten weeks at Nuremberg, transfer to the "open" witnesses' wing, shared with more than fifty celebrities. It was a shock to find that many seemed eager to save their skins by testifying against intimate colleagues. One who kept his dignity was Marshal Kesselring. He went out of his way to stage a reconciliation between Skorzeny and Admiral Horthy, whom the Americans had rescued from the Bavarian castle in which Skorzeny had immured him. Now the ex-Regent had a V.I.P. cell at Nuremberg as a witness with special privileges—one of them a supply of cigarettes. Skorzeny listened politely to his apologia: Horthy had always been a friend of Germany and had not wished to betray an ally. He listened and he smoked.

Weeks of monotony; then one day the chance of laying his hands on a long-forgotten luxury fell into his hands. Linen sheets, a stack of them! He snatched up three as he passed on his way to his cell. One went everywhere with him, softening the travail of his nights, for the rest of his captivity; one he gave to poor old Marshal Blomberg—who was to die shortly after in the prison hospital; the third to General Glaise-Horstenau—like Admiral Horthy, he had been A.D.C. to the Emperor Francis Joseph—who committed suicide some months later.

But though Skorzeny was behind bars, his legend stalked outside. One day the prison dreariness was enlivened by a military stand-to: troops were multiplied; armour-plated strongposts were sited to enfilade the corridors; machine-guns were posted all round, anti-tank traps hastily erected outside. The chuckling prison chaplain explained the excitement on a visit to Skorzeny's cell. A visiting general had told the chaplain in the Mess that remnants of the German Army outside were plotting to storm the Nuremberg prison and Palace of Justice—their leader was the notorious Colonel Skorzeny. When the chaplain insisted that Skorzeny was safely locked up inside the prison, the general said this could not be so—if anybody inside was calling himself Skorzeny he must be an impostor!

This scare had some foundation: long afterwards Skorzeny heard that a few of his own men had indeed concocted a wild scheme to get him out of jail.

May 1946: a move to Dachau; back to Nuremberg. . . . With Marshal Kesselring to some other camp, then to Darmstadt and back to Dachau. Dysentery, an eight-day hunger strike, hospital; an operation—his gall-bladder out at last. Trigger-happy G.I. guards played poker by his bed all night, while the wireless blared without stopping. The inevitable accident: a bullet through the ceiling!

"Guarded like a cobra," *Stars and Stripes* announced, reporting Skorzeny's "repeated escapes" from prison while he lay helpless on his back.

There was one comfort. With a few other "Skorzeny boys", Karl Radl had got a job in the prison kitchen gardens at Dachau. His convalescence was helped along by delicacies they smuggled in to him.

"Get Skorzeny ready." His best memory of those endless journeys was of one exciting day when, failing to reach jail in time, he and his guards stayed until next morning in a village. For the first time for months he found himself dining off china—with a knife and fork in addition to the regulation spoon. And he slept in a bed, while down below his escort celebrated.

It would have been easy to get away that night. He stayed to see it out and to prove that he had nothing to hide; besides, with legal freedom beckoning, why should he run away? He often remembered that chance to make a break—and sometimes wished he had been less nice in putting it aside.

CHAPTER XIV

> To forgive our enemies their virtues—that is a greater miracle.
>
> VOLTAIRE

"GET Skorzeny ready." Towards the end of July 1947, the familiar cry took him into the commandant's office at Dachau—and before a blaze of flashlights.

The chatter of reporters and photographers died down as he was marched in. With pleasure he saw that the Press had changed their warlike panoply for ordinary clothes; everyone looked friendlier. Release at last?

His hopes were high. Eight weeks earlier a War Crimes expert had come to Dachau to advise finally whether there was a case for trial. The decision seemed to turn on Operation "Greif"; in ten long sessions Skorzeny took his visitor through every stage of it and answered all his questions. His inquisitor was satisfied. "You have convinced me," he said, "that you did nothing which calls for punishment."

As time ran on without further word Skorzeny told himself that the War Crimes machinery was overburdened—more than a thousand of these cases were brought before the courts—and that with the law delays were almost mandatory. Already more than two years had gone by since the snap of handcuffs shattered his naïve belief that his surrender would be accepted like that of any other officer who had merely done his duty. His spell in jail—a string of jails—had been as long as the whole of his "commando" career. He had had time to learn some of the causes of Allied rancour: all he wanted now was to forget the wasted years, the treadmill of interrogations, the repetitious journeys, the body searches before and after Göring's suicide in Nuremberg.

He looked around the commandant's office. Inside the ring of expectant newspaper people were a group of officials and, he observed, a very pretty secretary. Then eight more prisoners of

war were led into the room; officers from various German services, he assumed they were all to be let out with him. A tall, spruce figure in American uniform advanced: it was Colonel Rosenfeld, who having held a high Security post during the Battle of the Bulge, was one of those who had closely questioned Skorzeny after his arrest.

Rosenfeld began to read from a document. His easy drawl was followed by a phrase-by-phrase translation into German. Skorzeny heard something about fighting in American uniform—it sounded like anything but a preamble to release.

The two voices droned on: a charge of stealing Red Cross parcels—he hardly took it in. What he had quite clearly followed, yet made nothing of, was an accusation that, with the other officers there charged, he had "conspired to ill-treat, torture and kill at least a hundred American prisoners of war."

Who were these other German officers? He scanned their strained faces; all but two he could not remember ever having seen before—how, then, could he have conspired with them?

Rosenfeld came to a stop. Shocked and bewildered, Skorzeny had to wait while another barrage of flash-bulbs was let off. Then armed guards hustled the prisoners into the courtyard, where he was at once the centre of a babble of horrified questions. How had this murder charge come about? Where had the massacre of Americans taken place—and when? Skorzeny assured them that in all his interrogations no one had asked about such a crime. It was new to the others, too.

That day which had promised so brightly ended behind the bars again. The nine prisoners were locked up three to a cell—which at least allowed them to put their heads together to concoct measures of defence. His companions seemed to be a random bunch of army, navy and air force officers. All wore the pallor of prison years. Like Skorzeny, they had seen the jail doors open for their release—and then clang shut again: some were nearing the end of resistance to the moral pressures of defeat. Twenty-six months had gone by since the Armistice, and thirty since the Battle of the Bulge; they had supposed that nothing new could be brought up against them. But here was a charge of dreadful gravity, levied without warning by the all-high Occupying Power.

There was no habit of comradeship between these strangers to

unite them in misfortune. Three of them might even have been expected to plant seeds of discord among the rest, but in this, at least, the Prosecution was to be disappointed. The first had sworn an incriminating affidavit in hospital: later he was to go back on it. Another, whose nerve had snapped, proved in the end to be useless to either side. The third was a young naval lieutenant who had raised the Prosecution's hopes by telling them his English mother had taught him to hate everything German. After some weeks he went to Skorzeny and confessed his impulse to work off this resentment on his fellow-prisoners; now they had come to know each other he would be a loyal comrade.

Skorzeny did all he could to raise the spirits of his dejected companions and bind them together for what lay ahead. But with the arrival of the chief lawyer appointed for their defence, hopes of a fair trial seemed to fade. Colonel Robert Durst was an American military lawyer and a cavalry officer of the hard school. Tight-lipped, with sharp eyes and an uncompromising chin, Durst stumped from one cell to another cross-questioning the defendants: the series of grillings which Skorzeny now suffered was the stiffest he had known. Durst showed no trace of sympathy for his German clients: their own lawyer seemed to be trying to force confessions. But on the fourth of his daily visits he broke into a broad smile and shook hands for the first time. "I am sure of your innocence on every charge," he declared. "Now I know you have nothing to hide I will fight for you as if you were my brothers."

Durst kept his word. He campaigned with foresight and daring against a tough, unrelenting Prosecution. No less devoted to saving the necks of their late enemies in the field were his juniors, Lieut.-Col. Donald McClure and Major L. I. Horowitz. It was Colonel McClure who was later on to tell the court that, having known the prisoners for weeks, he would feel proud to have such men in a unit under his command.

But before the three American officers could get down to work on the defence, six German barristers came forward to help—and without hope of fees, since the defendants were destitute. One of them, an Austrian lawyer called Dr. Peyrer-Angerman, even got himself arrested so as to be driven to Dachau with a new batch of prisoners, there being no other means at that time for a civilian to cross the re-erected Austro-German frontier.

This galaxy of talent produced a crisis of its own. Colonel Durst said that unless they were to be at legal sixes and sevens he would have to lay down the main lines of the defence himself: it would also be best if Skorzeny alone gave evidence on behalf of all the prisoners. Some of the German barristers objected to putting German lives wholly into the hands of an American officer. Skorzeny trusted Durst, but felt his proposal that one prisoner should speak for all was an odd elaboration of the democracy they had heard so much about. Finally, a vote was taken on Skorzeny's suggestion and the other prisoners agreed to give Durst and Skorzeny full powers. Three of the German lawyers walked out, leaving an attenuated team, but a united one.

Durst took another bold risk when the names of the tribunal were given out; this time with less happy results. Objecting to the nomination of the president, he was over-ruled.

And now began a stretch of most intensive work. Rosenfeld's indictment had given no exact figure of the number of Americans murdered; no names had been listed and no date given; even the place where the crime might have been committed. The defence searched in vain—in the memory of the prisoners, in army records, even in war-time rumours—for some clue to this mystery on which the lives of all the accused might depend: every scrap of evidence was scrutinised and every man questioned again and again, but the ugly outline could be neither obliterated nor filled in.

During these weeks before the trial the defendants were lodged with thieves and pickpockets and guarded by newly-recruited Poles. The Polish guards had no love for Germany—less still for America. They assured Skorzeny that if by any chance he escaped the Yankee hangman it would only be to face a Soviet executioner, for the Red Army were going to swallow the rest of Germany very soon. In 1947 Europe could certainly have been over-run in a week or so, but the Poles were off the party line in supposing the Russians wanted to "get" Skorzeny—except for their own use.

One night, a fellow prisoner was ushered, with respect, into Skorzeny's cell. He introduced himself: a Polish officer awaiting sentence as a Soviet spy. Enjoying the freedom of the prison because his guards were Communists, he could leave whenever he

liked, he said, and take Skorzeny with him: a glowing future awaited Mussolini's rescuer behind the Iron Curtain. Skorzeny laughed; he thought the officer was boasting. But three days later the Pole did in fact make off for the East, with the help of his guards.

His next visitors were three American officers who had much more difficulty in smuggling themselves into his cell. Giving their names and units, they offered to help in getting Skorzeny off by giving evidence that Allied troops had more than once killed Germans who surrendered. Skorzeny declined their offer: even if two wrongs could make a right, he had not killed any disarmed Americans, nor had his troops.

Later, Skorzeny was to compare the sporting gallantry of these former enemies with the weakness of some so-called friends. One was a German general, met months before in the witness wing at Nuremberg, who volunteered that during the war he had helped to list Allied breaches of international law. Though Skorzeny had no time for such legal ingenuities, Durst thought the general might usefully give evidence about British commando raids. But the general did not wish to risk the disfavour of Germany's new masters. He could remember absolutely nothing, he sighed, either of the conversation with Skorzeny or of the supposed list.

Meanwhile interest in the trial was rising outside the prison walls. Skorzeny heard that bets were being laid right and left on the verdict. His guards kept him posted on the odds, which started at ten dollars to one on his being hanged. Counsel and officials were reported to be handsomely backing their opinions, and the gambling fever infected American troops as far away as Munich.

Skorzeny tried to enter into the spirit when the date was fixed for the trial. It would start on August 18—the anniversary of his plane-dive into Sardinian waters during the search for Mussolini: that day four years ago he had escaped death by a hundred to one chance; surely he could beat lesser odds in a court of law.

August 18, and all was ready. To gratify their military judges with a tidy and regular appearance, the men had exchanged their varied uniforms for American prisoner-of-war garb stamped with the foot-high letters "P W". The final touch of uniformity was

lent by identity numbers which were hung around their necks. Skorzeny, dangling an oversize Number One, felt like a prize animal as he headed the parade out of the side door of the prison.

Across fifty yards of courtyard, from the "trial cells" to which they had been moved a few days earlier, the prisoners were marched by armed guards to a converted wooden barracks hall which was swarming with military police. Guards stood behind them, hand on holster; the white helmets of military police were dotted about the court and they were reinforced by ordinary troops who seemed ready for anything. Skorzeny hoped that these flattering precautions would not have the effect of impressing the tribunal with the desperate character of the accused.

Used to solitude and narrow cells, he found himself under the gaze of hundreds as the men were escorted to what looked like a row of wooden cinema seats alongside the defence counsel. The public benches were crammed with American officers and German civilians: *fräuleins* more buxom than at the end of the war, business men with brief-cases, long-haired youths who had never worn a uniform. The Press were there in force. Even the jaded court M.P.s who had seen so many trials stopped chewing —they had money on this one.

Nine beribboned U.S. colonels took their places on a platform under the stars and stripes: the tribunal. And as they settled down all eyes were turned on a single figure across the room: Colonel Rosenfeld, now chief Prosecutor. He stood beside the wall map—the Battle of the Bulge again—and laid down the pattern for his coming attack in the broad terms of the indictment. This done, he called the first Prosecution witness: Karl Radl.

For a stunned moment Skorzeny thought he had misheard. But up to the witness chair on its foot-high dais in the centre of the hall there walked his comrade in arms, his closest friend, to give evidence against him.

Radl's round face was scarlet. In a choked voice he confirmed that he was at Friedenthal headquarters when the volunteers for the "American Brigade" came in, and that he knew of Operation "Greif". A few more questions and Radl left the chair: he had been summoned only to confirm a document which was not even in dispute—that misbegotten appeal for English-speaking troops which Marshal Keitel had put out.

Colonel Durst rose to expostulate. Radl had been needlessly obliged to speak for the Prosecution—was this intended to make friends of Skorzeny's think that his adjutant had turned against him? A brisk passage between counsel followed, but—as all is fair in love and litigation—Radl was followed by a group of protesting prisoners who were asked only for minor evidence. These men were waiting execution for alleged shooting of American prisoners at Malmédy; their leader, Colonel Peiper, insisted that they had been forced to appear there and had nothing to say.

Another of Skorzeny's officers, Captain Werner Hunke, refused to open his mouth. For years the luckless Hunke had had to put up with being called by Radl "our old China hand", on account of his being posted by mistake to Friedenthal as a Far East expert. True enough, Hunke had been born in China, but his parents brought him home when he was a few months old and he had never left Europe since. Now he gave the discomfited Radl a lesson in the art of saying nothing.

The Prosecution might have had better luck with a supply captain who was sent to Friedenthal in the last months of the war and there rapidly antagonised most of his brother officers. Skorzeny had always defended him as a man of ability, and used to say that without his work during the Oder battle they could not have held the bridgehead so long. Now he was the one man from Friedenthal to turn "King's evidence". Unwilling to meet the eyes of his comrades in the court, he stammered out a statement that galvanised the Press box and sent reporters racing to the telephone. Here was a sensation indeed: Skorzeny had distributed bullets with a red ring around them—poisoned ammunition—to kill Americans in the Battle of the Bulge.

On this note the court rose for the day, leaving Durst to ask what Skorzeny knew about the charge. The answer was a strange one. He could not deny that there had been poisoned ammunition at Friedenthal. He could not deny that he had given it out.

One day in Russia, Skorzeny recalled, as the excited spectators trooped out, the Germans had pounced on two Soviet agents who were creeping into a German headquarters near Smolensk. They admitted they had been sent to kill a general, and their pistols were found to be loaded with unusual ammunition. Laboratory tests disclosed that in each bullet was a virulent new

poison: an animal shot in the leg with one of them died inside a minute.

German experts copied the bullets and sent two sample boxes of twenty-five to Friedenthal. Skorzeny used to hand one to any volunteer who was afraid of being forced to give away secrets if captured on a dangerous mission. "Put this bullet for yourself in the last chamber of your revolver," he used to say. "It will give you confidence, even if you never have to use it." Skorzeny also kept one in his own revolver because he did not want to fall alive into enemy hands during the war.

These bullets, he now told Durst, must be what the witness was thinking of—unless the man had mixed up two different things. By morning, they would know.

Back in his cell, Skorzeny got to work to procure the evidence he needed. He had won over a guard or two and now he smuggled out a message to Karl Radl in the ordinary prisoner-of-war camp outside the jail. Radl passed it on to friends in the town by way of the camp grape-vine. The answer came with Skorzeny's breakfast—a bullet in a piece of bread.

When the court met, Durst cross-examined the witness. Now pale and trembling, the supply officer confessed that he had also given evidence against German comrades at Nuremberg—and that it had been proved false. Then Durst held out the bullet Skorzeny had given him on his palm.

"Is that your poisoned ammunition?" he demanded.

The tribunal craned forward to see the exhibit, which was later brought round for their inspection. It was an ordinary-looking bullet, but with a red ring round it; and the witness said yes, that was the type which Skorzeny had issued to his commandos for the Ardennes battle. Then Durst forced him to admit that it was simply a waterproofed form of normal ammunition and that the poisoned bullets were altogether different.

If this description of the trial were limited to what Skorzeny remembers there would be many gaps—periods during which his mind raced to some past incident or rummaged for a mislaid fact. In a pad held on his knee he scribbled ideas and arguments; hundreds of pages a day were torn off for translation by the English-speaking naval lieutenant, who then handed them to Durst. At night Skorzeny worked in his cell, seven feet by four, shared with

a footpad who wondered at such industry. It was a double-bunked room, without a light, but through a hole in the corridor wall there came the faint beam of an electric bulb. Questions, comments, reminders—twenty or thirty sheets of close work; he had accepted the duty of prisoners' leader and must overlook no point that might help them. When it was done, the pages had to be taken to another cell for translation and then brought back ready to be passed to Durst when the court met next day.

At last Rosenfeld reached the main charges. On that of fighting in enemy uniform "in contravention to an annex of the Hague Convention of 1907" he had two witnesses. An American lieutenant told of capturing Germans wearing U.S. windjackets. Then came the affidavit signed by the sick prisoner in hospital. While in U.S. uniform, it said, he had fired on an American sergeant and missed.

The defence challenged this version of a momentary incident in the hurly-burly of the Ardennes. Even if the absent prisoner had fired, could he be said to be "fighting" if his opponent was untouched?

This promising controversy was cut short by a message from the hospital: after seeing a defence counsel the prisoner had withdrawn his affidavit.

On the count of stealing Red Cross parcels—American uniforms, according to the Prosecution, were the object of the theft—a U.S. officer testified that his parcels were held up during the Battle of the Bulge when he was a prisoner-of-war. He had dropped three pounds in weight. Skorzeny, who had lost fifty since his arrest, wondered when Rosenfeld was coming to the point.

Day after day the prisoners had waited and worried for some clue to the killing of "more than one hundred American prisoners", but not until all other charges had been aired did Rosenfeld approach this one—and then announced he would call no witnesses to back it up. Without explanation it had been advanced; now, without reason, it was withdrawn. The Prosecution rested its case.

Durst demanded his clients' immediate release. At this late stage in the interminable war crimes trials only prisoners accused of murder were being prosecuted. But for the empty charge of killing prisoners, then, the men might not be in court.

The tribunal decided that the trial should go on: the fate of the accused would now hang on the question of fighting in American uniform.

Then came a four-day break, which Durst used to prepare Skorzeny for the witness stand. Public interest had ebbed: arguments that swung back and forth on judicial points had worn down the patience of the gallery, and when the court resumed two-thirds of the benches were empty. The Press had gone—never suspecting that the real "sensation" lay just ahead.

Durst told the tribunal his first aim would be to clear the air of prejudice. The Prosecution had tried to discredit Skorzeny as a blackguard and a brute. He would show there was nothing treacherous in his conduct and, what was more remarkable, that he had always tried to spare lives—his enemies' as well as those of his own men.

In answer to Durst's questions, Skorzeny gave examples of his efforts to avoid bloodshed. He quoted also the order he had given his commandos before rescuing Mussolini: "The first shot to be fired will be fired by me—regardless of any action of the enemy and regardless of whether the enemy fires first." In the outcome, no shot had been fired at all.

Then, Operation Greif. With wall map and pointer, Skorzeny delivered a lecture on his part in the Battle of the Bulge—he could have done it in his sleep by now. All went smoothly until Durst asked about the famous plot to kill or capture General Eisenhower. This question the president ruled out of order: instead of being brought down in open court, the Eisenhower *canard* escaped again to flap its way around the world.

Now for the central problem: the rights and wrongs of wearing other people's uniforms. It was a tricky subject, as Durst had told Skorzeny in his cell. He thought there would be broad agreement with the German opinion which formed the legal basis of Operation "Greif": that you can go up to the enemy in disguise so long as you throw it off when fighting starts. How such theatrical quick-changes were to be performed on the battle-field did not concern the Law: there was room enough for argument over problems such as how closely the enemy might be approached under false colours, how far disguise could be carried and what is meant by

"fighting". One court might interpret the rules with hair-splitting exactness; another might be liberal.

There was a wide area of doubt, and over this dubious territory Durst now began to lead Skorzeny in the hope of finding firm ground on the other side. His first cautious move was to ask whether his witness had considered the rules of war "so as to conduct Operation 'Greif' within those rules".

Skorzeny said he had. "I gave the emphatic order that my men should not fight in uniform. Disguise should be worn only until they reached their destinations."

The next questions revealed the course Durst meant to take. He would make his way along the stepping stones of precedent—but of Allied precedent, which alone could take the weight of the defence. For if it turned out that the victors had gone before them on this route, either the "rules of war" were obsolete or the Allies were guilty of the same crimes.

So Skorzeny found himself answering that he was not the first to use enemy uniform; in fact, the Germans came across the notion in Intelligence reports on Allied operations. He recalled that British officers had been captured wearing enemy uniform in Hungary, and were not shot. In both Italy and Jugoslavia German depots were often raided by partisans to get uniforms which they then wore in battle. The Polish patriot General Bohr used German uniform to start his Warsaw rising in 1944. Russians, to his knowledge, had frequently adopted this ruse. The Japanese had done the same thing. And so had the Americans.

Looking round the attentive court, Skorzeny repeated what Hitler had told him of Americans in German uniform at Aachen. There were other such instances. At Saarlautern, for example, Americans bluffed their way in a German tank over the bridge which led to Frankfurt. But it was the Aachen deception which had given Hitler the idea for this very Operation Greif. And in every instance he had mentioned the men were armed and, where necessary, had made use of their arms.

For two days on the witness stand Skorzeny stood with Durst as his companion in the centre of the legal morass. Assertions were made which offered firm footing—but proof was not easily had when the Germans had lost all their records. However, said Durst to the judges, they could see that the use or abuse of

another's uniform was commoner than was supposed: certainly than was officially admitted. How did it square with the much-discussed rules of war?

He invoked the experience of this tribunal of senior officers to testify that international law could not consist only in the series of overlapping treaties, codes and conventions formally agreed by nations in the bygone past. Common-sense changes in the usages and customs of the belligerents made up an unwritten law which was practised by all.

In accusing Skorzeny of using American uniform, the Prosecution had invoked an annexe to the Hague Convention of 1907 —but that article, already forty years old, had been outdated by two world wars of a kind the legislators had not dreamed of.

With high forensic skill Durst conjured up a vision of the written law always trying to overtake new weapons, new techniques, even new dimensions such as air warfare, and never quite succeeding. It was an exposition to delight the legal mind, but Durst knew that in a military court an ounce of practice outweighs a ton of theory. And so, with an air of finality which puzzled his onlookers, he produced another witness: "Wing-Commander Forrest Yeo-Thomas."

A short, sturdy figure in the faded blue of the R.A.F. walked to the witness chair, sat down, and looked quizzically about him. Wondering what on earth a British officer might have to say for the defence, Skorzeny noticed that he wore some exceptional ribbons; among them French decorations for gallantry and the George Cross.

Durst, who loved surprises, had sprung one more, and although it was not until long afterwards that Skorzeny learned Yeo-Thomas's singular record, it soon became evident that here before his eyes was one of the most formidable and bizarre personalities that even the British Secret Service could enlist.

During the war Yeo-Thomas's *nom de guerre*—the White Rabbit —became famous to the French underground. One of the inner ring of Secret Service chiefs directing French patriots from London, he used this code-name in radio messages to the Resistance. But stirring up trouble in which he took no active part was not to Yeo-Thomas's taste: he decided to strike out on his own. First he parachuted into German-occupied France to find out what

his friends needed. Then he went back to London, leaving them a promise to return shortly—and not empty-handed.

Arms and equipment for an underground rabble who would make life unpleasant for the Germans? Highly romantic, the experts said, but quite impracticable. Goaded by this scepticism, Yeo-Thomas stormed Downing Street single-handed; in a hard-hitting interview he won Churchill over to his faith that, no matter how slim our own resources, it would pay to arm the French. That agreed, he dropped back into France to get Frenchmen of all politics united in a plan of insurrection when the Allies landed.

Yeo-Thomas was betrayed into the hands of the Gestapo. But the White Rabbit was too tough to talk and too determined to hold. Condemned to death, he escaped after D-day from Buchenwald, leaving there a corpse in his place, and walked back over Germany until he burst across no-man's land into the Allied lines to carry on his war. After the Armistice he went back to Germany for uncompleted business: at the Buchenwald War Crimes trial the evidence of this British Secret Service chief got twenty-two of the guards and doctors hanged.

Hardly the man, one might have thought, to help in saving another group of Germans charged with war crimes; but Durst had studied the evidence at Buchenwald and decided that some of the White Rabbit's ways, as he scuttled about under the noses of the Germans during the war, were very much to the point.

Yeo-Thomas's appearance gave the trial a fresh turn and a wildly improbable climax; yet few outside the thinly-filled court ever heard of it. The Press had drifted back to their offices in London, Paris or Frankfurt; glutted with war trials, their newspapers had put Skorzeny out of mind until they had the verdict. As for the Prosecution, they were baffled by this apparition: palpably this British officer had no cause to love his late enemies, yet two years after being demobilised he had put on uniform again and crossed Europe to give evidence for them. Why?

This question was soon answered—and with a devastating candour. Yeo-Thomas told the court he had never met Skorzeny or any of his companions, but he wanted to say that in his opinion there was nothing wrong in the "crimes" they were accused of—

whether they had committed them or not. From all he had heard, the prisoners had behaved like gentlemen.

It being plain that this witness was a man of few words, all unequivocal, Durst invited him forthwith to cross the doubtful zone of international law. Had Allied forces, he innocently inquired, ever used disguise and the appropriation of enemy identity as an instrument of war?

Yeo-Thomas advanced without hesitation. Of course they had, he said. Enemy insignia, arms and equipment—everything. Durst asked him to quote an instance from his own activities, and after a moment's reflection Yeo-Thomas told how he had planned the rescue of a Resistance comrade who was arrested by the Germans while Yeo-Thomas was on a visit to London. To do so he had first to parachute back into France.

"My comrade," he said, "was in prison at Rennes, in Brittany. I reconnoitred the jail and bribed one of the guards to find out when rounds were made and the general procedure.

"Then I put some of my men who spoke German into German uniform and secured copies of German papers required to take a prisoner out of jail. We stole a German car and I also had a van rigged up to resemble a prison van.

"The plan was to ring for the gatekeeper and show him false papers. We would drive in with the German car and then bring the van in and stall it so that they could not close the gate.

"The men in German uniform, one of them disguised as an officer, were to go into the guard-room. If the prisoner were not delivered to us on sight of the papers, if there were any hesitation, we would dispose of the guards quickly and silently. To make sure there would be no alarm I had planned to cut the telephone."

As Yeo-Thomas paused, Durst led him to the *dénouement.*

Did you obtain German uniforms for this purpose?—Yes.

How were they obtained?—The details I could not tell you. I gave instructions to obtain uniforms by hook or by crook.

Did you also contemplate the use of German insignia?—We contemplated everything that could be used to ensure the success of the operation.

Insignia of rank or other German insignia?—Absolutely.

Did you also plan to go armed?—Certainly: we had to dispose of the guards.

Precisely what do you mean by that?—If necessary, kill them. We couldn't take prisoners.

Were these plans for the use of German uniforms put into effect?—Yes.

On the eve of the raid at Rennes Yeo-Thomas himself was arrested, so Durst turned back to the matter of "usage". Was it the custom of the British Secret Service, he asked, to use German uniforms for a ruse?

Yeo-Thomas answered in this form: "We were given assignments to do and we were told 'Go ahead and do them. We don't want to know how you do them; but if you are caught that is your pigeon; we shall disown you'."

Now for "fighting" in enemy uniform. Durst trod delicately: he did not yet know his man.

"When using German uniforms," he inquired, "did the operators of the Secret Service go armed?"

"Yes," said Yeo-Thomas.

"To prevent danger of discovery," asked Durst gently, "what would the practice be?"

Yeo-Thomas glanced round the court: from the tribunal of soldiers which had to pronounce on these profound and intricate problems of behaviour, to the breathless gallery and across to Colonel Rosenfeld, with his law books and his wall map of a fading battle-field—and then this man whom the resources of the modern torture chamber could not break brought down in ruins the whole edifice of reasoning and precedent, conventions and annexes, with five words.

"Bump off the other guy," he said.

Durst hid a smile, and Skorzeny knew the case was over. There remained the question of pilfering Red Cross parcels to obtain uniform—again no time or place was stated in this count—and Durst took the opportunity of asking how the British acquired German uniforms and identity papers.

"Well," said Yeo-Thomas ruminatively, "we had means. We used to steal them from German headquarters in France. Quite a number of the French secret service used to kill an occasional German officer or man and take his papers . . . and there are many other ways I could not tell you about."

Durst asked: "Were papers ever taken from prisoners of war?"

The answer came: "Most decidedly. It was the duty of a prisoner not to have any papers if he was taken. If he had them, it was just too bad."

So there it was. Yeo-Thomas had illustrated the "changing usages of war". When he had testified against the staff of Buchenwald it was in order to punish their brutality against helpless civilians: for his own part, he was a soldier, and must look after himself. He asked no quarter of his enemies and offered none. His appearance on the legal scene had put international law itself on trial in that wooden barracks hall at Dachau.

Because Yeo-Thomas came out roundly with the fact that the Allies had also done things of which Skorzeny was accused, the court had either to acquit the prisoners or declare that there was one law for those who won, another for the side which lost. To soldiers wondering whether in the future they were expected to go into action with a copy of codified international law against which all orders could be checked, it gave a glimpse of daylight. You can break the written law if the enemy breaks it too—but to be doubly sure you had better emerge on the winning side. Such are the rules of war. "Bump off the other guy." Kill or be killed. If you come out of it—a medal maybe and no questions asked. If you don't—"too bad."

All through Yeo-Thomas's evidence Rosenfeld had been jumping up with objections in the manner familiar to film-goers. But when his turn came to cross-examine he had no questions to ask.

As the wing-commander stepped from the dais, Skorzeny gave a quiet order; together the prisoners stood to attention and bowed. Then they sat down again.

Skorzeny was not allowed to see his new ally before he left Dachau that day, but he sent him a note of thanks. He got this reply: "You did a damned good war job. I'm sure you will get off. In any case I have a flat in Paris if you should need somewhere to lie up." Yeo-Thomas added his business address in the Rue Royale—Molyneux, the dressmaker: for it was from that perfumed *atelier*, of which he was a director, that the White Rabbit went running home to be in England when danger threatened her in 1939.

The verdict was not in doubt: the accused were acquitted on

Where the frogmen struck

A span of one of the two Nymegen bridges which carried the spearhead of the Allied attack into Germany has collapsed; the other bridge, further on, is also damaged. In the foreground is the emergency bridge which the British built after the attack.

Colonel A. H. Rosenfeld reads the charge sheet to Skorzeny at Dachau War Crimes Camp.

all counts. But then opened a strangely drawn-out epilogue on which the curtain refused to fall.

The first *envoi* was Colonel Rosenfeld's. He congratulated the prisoners: they must understand that he had merely carried out his orders as a soldier. "Just like us!" Skorzeny retorted. The colonel had an afterthought which he imparted to the Press: "I still think this Skorzeny is the most dangerous man in Europe."

No freedom—yet. From the "open camp", to which he was carried shoulder-high by his fellow-prisoners and where comrades pressed gifts on him—a cake, a sausage, an apple—"to celebrate" he was sent back to the cells: a camp party for the Mussolini rescue anniversary, on September 12, had to be held that night without him.

What had happened? Denmark and Czechoslovakia each wanted Skorzeny: it seemed there were terrible crimes to answer for. A fortnight of bewilderment and then: it was all a mistake—neither nation had asked for his extradition. But headlines had again revived the legend of the ruthless killer. So back to the "open camp". Now, at last, he knew real friendliness; from the commandant down nobody could do enough for him. His prison clothes were in rags: an American sergeant got some German army cloth and had a suit made for him. "Everyone I meet," he wrote to his family, "makes me feel again that I am a soldier among soldiers, even though I am still sharing the lot of prisoners of war."

He and Radl were asked to help the U.S. Army Historical Division to prepare an account of the Mussolini operation. They consented, and went jolting down the road in a wired-over truck, back to the old interrogation camp at Oberursel—and back into felons' cells again.

This time they "struck" for better quarters, and got them. The camp had adopted an odd security rule: all Germans must use code names. Radl was "Baker" and Skorzeny "Abel"—which did not deter the G.I.s from shouting for "Skorzeny" whenever he was wanted. Two old friends arrived: "X-ray" and "Zebra". The mad-hatters' party was joined by "Axis Sally"—an American who had earned her pseudonym on Goebbels' radio: later she was sent to prison for ten years. Her snow-white

hair bobbed over the exercise books as she gave Skorzeny lessons in English.

Christmas came, but no release; instead, he had a fortnight on parole. Hanna Reitsch was living in Oberursel; Skorzeny called on her before hurrying to Munich to see his family. It was a winter of famine; the city was a gutted ruin full of homeless beings. "If I could look openly into these poor devils' faces," he says today, "it is only because I, too, had lost everything in the war."

A punctual return to Oberursel, to hear that he had been shadowed while away: the Americans still thought Hitler was alive and Skorzeny might lead them to his hiding-place.

January passed, a bitter month. February: their work for the American War Histories was complete. And then—an American Commission, hot on Hitler's trail. A German aircraftman had said he had seen Hitler a few days after his reported death landing with Skorzeny from an aeroplane. Doctors interrupted the questioning to announce that the aircraftman was not right in the head.

Now it was almost over. One more wildcat story about Hitler which impelled the Americans to take Skorzeny back to Nuremberg for examination, and the Allies had finished with him. So—he was moved from a U.S. prison camp to a German one.

Long before, he and Radl had volunteered for the mysterious process of "de-nazification"; now another waiting period set in. To fill up time they helped to clear the bombed ruins of the nearest town; any afternoon in Darmstadt you could have seen the late chief of Germany's special troops marching to work with pick and shovel, or riding along the tram tracks on Darmstadt's "rubble express". A few recognised him; students who brought a precious cigarette or two, housewives with ersatz coffee.

Four or five more months went by like this. His case was postponed seven times. New documents had come up, new charges were in the air. Officials shrugged: "*We* don't understand what it's all about. It's nothing to do with us." Skorzeny wrote to Yeo-Thomas for advice. The White Rabbit replied: "Escape!"

It was nearly a year since his acquittal. More than once he could have absconded; he stayed because he stubbornly wanted to clear his name of any taint. Now he had had enough. He went round the camp, telling all his jailers that he would remain no longer.

On July 27, 1948, Skorzeny got out. Without wire-clippers, rope-ladders, bribes or tunnelling. He stowed away.

A transport pool car was due to leave the camp. No guards in sight. A word with the German driver and he squeezed himself into the luggage boot. Three or four other prisoners shielded the scene of struggle while Radl, convulsed with laughter, forced the door shut on Skorzeny's ample bulk. The car drove through the gate. Around the corner the driver released an apoplectic fugitive who then subsided into the seat alongside him.

Friends outside the wire had arranged for a suitcase to be waiting at a railway halt ten miles from Darmstadt. He changed in a wood, then took the train to Stuttgart. Next day he was at Berchtesgaden, in the high mountains that were to have been Hitler's last redoubt.

How would his flight be taken? A broad hint soon came that the German authorities were glad to be relieved of the decision on Skorzeny's future. They had nothing against him, but the release of "the most dangerous man in Europe" might upset the apple-cart of Allied bounty to Western Germany. He should stay out of sight until the fuss was over so that they might not be forced to re-arrest him.

Skorzeny refused to live in hiding: disguise, then—that was the answer! A phial of peroxide sufficed to confuse the curious: snapshots taken at that time show a fair-haired giant hugging his daughter who had been brought to Berchtesgaden on a visit. He spent some months in sunbathing, climbing, tree-felling; and was content. His tribulations had made deeper inroads into his strength and emotional reserves than he had been willing to admit.

By early spring in 1949 he was ready for a wider world; and his escape had been forgotten. Near Munich, with his wife, he rediscovered good fellowship alongside, among many others, the American town major. That summer he drove openly about Germany, seeking out a war-time comrade here and there, and finding too often a widow and a family without a head.

October 1949: they went to French friends at St. Germain-en-Laye; Paris, untouched by war, was within all too easy reach. A camera shutter snapped: the picture of Skorzeny walking up the

Champs-Élysées was seized on by *Humanité* to rouse Red riot in the capital. Reporters rushed out to look for him; he was gone. On a farm near Lyons he passed the winter and regained some of his old verve. Then up to Megève, in near-by Savoy, for ski-ing; there he read how one Otto Skorzeny was constantly dashing, in the "neo-Nazi cause", between Cairo, New York, Buenos Aires and Rome. He found humour in the Press and much solace in the friendliness of all the French he knew: those "historic animosities" between nations were strangely absent in the people he met, even when they knew who he was.

Another spring found Skorzeny himself again—and ravenous for work. But his return to Germany was an unseasonable reminder of the martial virtues at a time when it was all-important for the Bonn Government to turn a new face, pacific, decorous, upon the world. On requesting a work permit Skorzeny was reminded that he came from Austria—and had not Austria been liberated from the German fatherland since the war? Why, then, all he need do was travel to Vienna and throw himself into the arms of the Allies as a liberated Austrian! For a man who believed that "at certain turning-points, there is only one way to go", this was no signpost. He was the soldier of a defeated country which had tried to fight the Allies to a standstill: such he must remain.

Spain offered domicile, with a Nansen passport issued to the stateless. And the move fitted in with Skorzeny's last military plan.

War had flared up again in the summer of 1950, threatening to sweep from Korea across the world. The Western Allies were in the first days of their rearmament; they could not stop a Russian advance short of the Pyrenees. Skorzeny thought the Spanish army—brave, disciplined and inured to guerilla hardships—might slow down the rush if trained to modern ways. Knowing how a little yeast could leaven the military loaf, Skorzeny thought he might raise four or five crack divisions around which could be built the first "European Army" for special tasks in the defence of the West.

Germany was full of ex-soldiers who could find no place in civil life: the Allies, too, held many prisoners of war: let the best among these volunteer for the new corps. If finally driven out of Spain the troops could be used to defend Spanish North

Africa from Russian attack across the Gibraltar Straits. Nor were Skorzeny's intentions all defensive—many a shock can be inflicted on an invader in Spain by a leader who keeps his wits about him.

Those few German generals whose prestige survived defeat welcomed Skorzeny's plan; the Pentagon was interested, and the Spanish authorities, too. Then politics and protocol clogged the machinery of agreement. After years of ostracism by the West, the Spaniards insisted that the first official approach should come from Washington: the Americans said it must come from Spain. Meanwhile, the danger of general war receded: in the spring of 1951 Skorzeny abandoned the plan and turned with relief to mend his own affairs.

With a desk, a filing-cabinet and a little borrowed capital, he had already founded an engineering agency in two rooms overlooking the Gran Via, Madrid's main street. Work, work, work: a formula so rare in Castilian business life could scarcely fall short of success.

Spain needed everything an engineer could make or get, and suddenly Skorzeny found he had what the business world so prizes—connections. In the witness wing at Nuremberg, where he was kept for months during the war crimes proceedings against German commercial trusts, he met as fellow jailbirds many leading industrialists, scientists and economists: their hours of discussion there taught him much about the business world. So it was that in 1952 he was able to arrange the biggest post-war deal between Spain and Germany for five million dollars' worth of railway stock and machine tools. Hardly a week goes by now without one or other of his colleagues from the witness wing arriving in Madrid to look him up.

In the midst of his new preoccupations came a bulletin from Bonn: Skorzeny had been "de-nazified" in his absence by the court of Hessen. His record was found to be unspotted—after seven years. Already the Allied Control office in Madrid which investigated ex-enemy aliens had approved Skorzeny's request for travel documents. So he could go abroad, drumming up business.

Last summer, meeting Skorzeny again on his return from a circuit of Africa, the author was struck by the highly-placed people who had welcomed this unusual commercial traveller:

British, French, Spanish, Belgian, Portuguese officials in all the territories he had visited. The legend, then, was still alive, and the interest that opens doors. A predictable postscript: having called on Egypt's rulers, he was confidently rumoured to be sending frogmen against British ships in the Canal.

A name for lawlessness, however undeserved, is not easily shaken off. When later on the deposed Sultan of Morocco was whisked from Corsica by his French guards to an island in the Indian Ocean, Paris reported that the move was intended to foil the Arab League, who had offered Skorzeny £500,000 to carry the Sultan off to his friends in Cairo. Asked to comment, Skorzeny could only express mock surprise—if the French Government were really so anxious, why had they not made him a still better offer to ensure the Sultan's safety—by doing nothing? "After all, I'm a *retired* kidnapper," he says.

The world's a stage; those who win fame are expected to repeat their rôles interminably. But while report harks back to his past, the man himself finds the new world of affairs far more engrossing. In Spain, today, he has all sorts of enterprises under way, his favourite being a project for harnessing the wind to drive new industries with a gush of power, free and inexhaustible. The first machines, prototypes with three propellers each, are being assembled and he dreams of setting one on every other hill-top. A fancy worthy of Cervantes? Skorzeny grins: "If you are thinking of Don Quixote, remember that I want to build windmills, not knock them down. I am constructive!"

As ever, the truth about Otto Skorzeny lies in a contradiction of the obvious. Just as, when you get to know him, that "gangster" scar speaks for a youth of study and self-discipline, so, too, his windmills are not the picturesque anachronisms that spring to mind. They are extremely practical and realistic, the latest thing in steel.

CHAPTER XV

In war it is not men, but the man who counts.

NAPOLEON

THE story of Skorzeny has been told. It has shown the impact of his "unusual ideas" on varied situations of war. What remains still to be determined is the true place of such ideas in the future.

When the time came for me to leave Madrid this question had not yet been explored. No matter, I thought: in working through the mass of notes and documents I had assembled, and in reviewing our talks on each point, the principles that had guided his conduct would gradually become plain. Then, at some later stage, we could consider how they might be more widely used.

Skorzeny agreed that any "moral" to be drawn from his missions would probably emerge when I had time to think it all over and see my friends at home. So on that we parted, with Skorzeny unnecessarily assuring me that he hopes to see the day when a monument in every country to the unknown soldier of *all countries* will signalise man's freedom from the slavery of arms. Until then, he said, the West must depend for salvation above all on new methods wherever they can be found.

Wherever they can be found . . . But new methods are not to be plucked from the air; many are already discernible among the shadows of the last world war—and not of that war alone. Some of Skorzeny's undertakings, for instance, seemed to hark back to the ancient days. The capture of Budapest Castle bore the stamp of daring and bluff which enlivened Homer. The search for Mussolini was Cœur de Lion brought up to date. The American Brigade which Skorzeny trained might have been raised in the Book of Kings instead of for the Battle of the Bulge. Such methods showed that high issues may still depend on the skill and energy of the individual commander.

In time, the narrative was done and I had arrived at some broad conclusions with which Skorzeny, when I consulted him, agreed. But it was not enough to examine his motives or dissect his reasoning in relation to events which now lay a decade behind. The theories of a man whose thoughts had outrun those of most of his contemporaries should be tested against the pattern of today's happenings and also the menaces of tomorrow.

So I put aside the manuscript until presently business took me to Paris. Not, as in younger days, to the Ministry of War, where they talked so convincingly of Maginot defence, but out to the countryside beyond St. Cloud where staff officers from fourteen countries offered a façade of unity and determination labelled SHAPE. Because that unity came from the top, I sought out the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Europe, and although I must respect his confidence, so multi-national an organisation can have few secrets—from the Russians least of all. It will therefore be known in Moscow that the West's announced target of some seventy divisions, to be reached within four years of the Korean alarm, is no longer merely out of sight: it is out of range. Instead of seventy divisions under arms if Russia marched, SHAPE might have thirty or so. Given time, reserves plus a West German army would swell the ranks; and in a third world war United States manpower could be relied on from the start. There were other factors—logistics and infrastructure, as they are known to the sophisticates of SHAPE—which might "give the Russians pause": this pause, in the view of British brass-hats, would be accompanied by a bloody nose. And if the Russians still advanced—well, that was where the reserves, especially from the United States, would come in.

Affairs later took me to New York and there I found myself in a preserve of military thought among the skyscrapers of the harbour, Governor's Island. The island stands guard on the metropolis just as it did centuries ago when King George's flag flew from England's Government House: today it is the headquarters of the First Army. My host, who had seen much service in Europe, was on the quayside when the army ferry brought me over from the Battery. After luncheon we toured the island: officers' homes set among lawns, buildings flanked by muzzle-loading cannon, even a garrison chapel where tattered British

standards hang. A little later, I was brought up against the realities of American manpower.

They were discussing, in one of the staff offices, something called "the division slice". Regard the division as a pyramid. Its apex was made of men in the front line. Then came a slab of supporting troops, and after that, in broadening strata to the base, layers of cooks, clerks and commissariat. Slice down the pyramid and you found that for every man with a gun America had twenty-five others in uniform who were occupied in passing, not merely the ammunition, but all the myriad items of welfare and entertainment regarded as necessities.

Could this ratio of auxiliaries to fighting men be brought down to, say, twenty to one "without hurting anyone"? Could the high standard of living in the American Services be squared with a reasonable percentage of effectives? It seemed to need some 50,000 men to field a full American division, whereas a Russian division ran to about 12,000—almost all fighting troops. Even if welfare gave some place to warfare, you would want at least three times as many Americans as Russians to equalise divisional strength in the front line—and where were they to come from? To set against every three Americans of fighting age the Soviet Union has not merely *one* man but *four*! And what if, as was probable, Red China came in with the Russians? General Eisenhower might well warn that manpower is "America's most precious commodity".

A week later in Washington I saw the problem approached from another angle. Backers of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's project for invading Red China had seized on an expression used by the American President. "Let Asians fight Asians," Eisenhower had said, meaning that Oriental countries should stand up against Communist encroachment. At once this declamatory phrase became a battle-cry; and in speeches and newspapers "free Asians" were urged to join the crusade: Japan, the Philippines, Malaya, Siam, Burma, Indonesia—all should raise great armies for the policy of "global containment". By way of example, the enthusiasts pointed to the island of Formosa, where half a million warriors who had followed Chiang Kai-shek into exile after the civil war were said to be burning to liberate China. And, by way of inspiration, the American fleet which "neutral-

ised" Formosa during the Korean war had lately been removed. It was open season for invading the Chinese mainland, and the U.S. Secretary of State told me I should go and see for myself the new spirit of attack.

But on Formosa, when I found opportunity to go out there, the eight million inhabitants seemed insensible to the "free Asian" cause. Huge U.S. military and economic missions had built up a show-window, but the army which Chiang Kai-shek had brought over were growing old in exile, and disillusioned. One officer confessed he had the feeling of living in a sea-girt concentration camp for Red China's enemies rather than of being one of an invasion force. Much the same fatalism reigned elsewhere in the Far East; apart from some of the American-trained Chinese in Formosa, the South Koreans and a minority of French-led troops in Indo-China, few seemed to care about "free Asia"—if effort were the price of freedom.

A harder spirit has been instilled into "the other side". In Malaya later I talked in a clearing with a freshly taken Communist commissar: he had been fighting the British for seven years and was still impudently cheerful. On a frontier bridge with China, I saw Red sentries brandishing tommy-guns and glaring with that same savage spirit which made the Chinese attack in Korea with a ferocity unexampled in this race for generations. In Viet-Nam, too, their cousins had bled the French of 100,000 men and made unity impossible not merely in Indo-China but also in France—and therefore to a large extent in the Western world.

All along that arc around Red Asia, through the bazaar gossip and its echoes in the polyglot Embassies and white-pillared Government Houses, one sensed a vast pressure of humanity: in terms of manpower, inexhaustible. Already the various Allied headquarters on the periphery were calculating that the new Chinese "model armies" would soon be able to upset neighbouring Governments merely by mobilising men in one area or another from Siam to India. Given time to organise, the Chinese will field at least 150 divisions, well trained and armed with heavy equipment from Russian arsenals: light arms they already manufacture to Soviet specifications. And since Moscow can call up 400 more, the Communist bloc would confront the world with

a total of 550 divisions. Five hundred and fifty divisions, and not just men in uniform—fighting men. The Western coalition, talking of raising 70 divisions, had failed to do it.

Now I could see why America was so determined to keep another war half a world away. Last time, fighting the Japanese, all her Pacific defences were penetrated. Even in 1941 the dangers of bombardment and perhaps invasion seemed close. Passing over Pearl Harbour on my way to the Far East I had seen the moorings where the American fleet was sunk—and that was eight hours' flying from San Francisco. It took all night to reach Wake Island, where smashed invasion tanks rusted near the airfield. MacArthur's fortress of Corregidor came into range next day: the Philippines, in 1941, had been America's front line in the Pacific; but not now.

To reach the farthest rock of America's defence in the Pacific one must travel four thousand and more miles to Okinawa, a former outpost of the Japanese Empire which has already acquired shoe-shine stands, coco-cola machines, last week's magazines and "comics" from Chicago. Bulldozers were busy: a sergeant told me the island was being "made over" as Uncle Sam's Gibraltar.

Okinawa lies midway across the East China Sea. To the north is America's ally, Japan, a few minutes' jet flight from Soviet territory; and South Korea, within easy bomber range of Peking and Vladivostock. To the south, lies Chiang Kai-shek's island of Formosa which, with its ports and airfields, constitutes a ready-made base against Red China.

Such is America's stockade, at the farthest extremity of the widest ocean—and not too much dependence was put on it by the military missions and headquarters in the area. So that when I got back to London to find that the Allied defence pattern was already changing, I was not surprised. It seemed that with the realisation that even three or four score divisions could not "contain" as many hundreds, the doctrine of holding back Communist power with close-up checks at every accessible point had gone out of vogue. Instead there came the New Look in defence. Armies, so far from being increased, were to be cut down. Divisions would become "battle groups" of 12,500 each. Air power took the limelight with its new partner, the Bomb. Since

there was no hope of matching the standing armies of the Red bloc, long-range weapons would carry "massive retaliation" if the Communists dared to move.

The manpower equation was shelved, if not solved: instead of mustering her land forces around the Red empire, America would step back in order to hit harder. What a Niagara of dollars spent on conventional defence had failed to do, nuclear fission would achieve in its proliferating forms. So my homecoming brought me back to the front line again, with Britain both the Okinawa of the West for launching atomic reprisals and Europe's Formosan base for dispatching liberating legions to the mainland. We were invited to take comfort from the news that the Red Army had been stalemated, so that now—if the chain of logic held—there should be no danger of big wars at all.

Yet everything seemed to go on as before—with armies and navies, however outmoded, remaining almost at the same level; and when America set off a series of hydrogen-bomb explosions her allies showed more consternation than gratitude. Nor did the New Look still American apprehensions. Instead, they seemed to become more pressing. Ships entering harbour were "screened" for nuclear material, radar networks were to be extended for thousands of miles, the Arctic circle must be perpetually patrolled—and then, how would the scientists stop atom-headed rockets? Looking back to the start of my tour, Governor's Island epitomised a baffled civilisation. There it lay, a watchdog at the feet of the richest city on the globe, and helpless. The wheel had almost turned full circle; back to where my speculations had begun. Once again I could examine Skorzeny's ideas and consider that suggestion, made before I met him, that "he fought the last war by methods we shall use in the next—if we wake up in time".

Among the post that was waiting for me in London was a newspaper from Spain in which a meeting at Valencia University was described. It must have been a notable occasion: the hall crowded to the doors with twelve hundred professors, students, officers from staff colleges—and on the platform, "seated between the Deans of Medicine and Law like some visitant from Mars, el Coronel Skorzeny". He had been invited to speak on the future of war, and the core of his discourse was contained in these three paragraphs:

"Another world war will bring the strategy of wide spaces to the fore. Long, connected fronts will not exist; we shall have to think as well as talk of everyone being in the front line. The general will share the dangers of the private in the foxhole; battle will swirl round both alike. This means that strategic operations with limited forces will be able to play a foremost rôle; it may even be a decisive one.

"Again, between the major war theatres there will be a wide space for lightning strokes which may overturn a slower-moving adversary. During the last world war general staffs shied away from setting up what they called side-shows; in another they will be looking everywhere for such opportunities if they want to win.

"That is not all. By bringing into play methods which have yet to be fully tried out, another war may be ended almost before it has begun. Do not mistake me, gentlemen; I am not now referring to the new means of mutual annihilation created by the great Powers. I am thinking rather of the one instrument which will always be incalculable—the secret weapon, Man."

This, then, was Skorzeny's fighting philosophy, his theory of warfare to match the times. He predicted that wide changes on the battlefield would open the way for ventures by which small groups of men might decide great issues. A new technique would make brain and nerve win victories over guns and concrete; it might even forestall the nuclear explosion, if occasion offered. And this technique would rest on the belief that the supreme weapon is a mind divested of the wrappings of routine and the encrustations of the past; unlike all other weapons its workings cannot be dismantled or betrayed, nor need it strike twice in the same way.

A similar conviction, of course, prompted many young commanders on both sides in the last war to gain the unlikeliest successes. The dam-busting flier, the human submarine, the swimmer who matched his wits against a naval flotilla—these freaks who ripped through the most impassable defences ushered in new forms of attack whose fulfilment lay in the individual will.

I remembered Skorzeny's introduction to the Prussian barrack square. It was there he first studied the mass-produced regulars

who are the pride of camp and field. Would not such soldiers be lost if you played upon their parade-ground impulses and upon the fact that they were taught always to wait for orders? He decided to put this theory to the test: in doing so, made a second discovery. However little they thought for themselves, the military robots quickly responded if you gave them fire to return. Hence Skorzeny's habit of getting close enough to "feel the enemy's coat". If challenged, an air of friendly authority might get him past the sentry: then, should discovery come, he was inside the citadel.

Skorzeny found that troops confronted with such a reverse do not recover their senses for quite a time; like an anaesthetist he tried to estimate when his patient would come round. For the Mussolini operation he counted on three minutes of chaos after the gliders landed—long enough to reach the prisoner's side—and was not disappointed. Later, Skorzeny reckoned it as nearer four minutes than three; but then, he said jokingly, three minutes is the time for ordinary soldiers, and Mussolini's guard were very well drilled indeed!

To get the better of the mass mind, this weapon Man has to be carefully forged, and by a process which ensures instant obedience while emboldening the soldier to use his wits. He accepts discipline, but understands that it is not an end in itself. As Skorzeny put it: "Ask for volunteers for dangerous work. Pick out the best. Train them in fellowship. Then they will develop qualities that no one has ever suspected them to possess. They will follow you through anything: they will even live and fight and go to certain death by themselves."

If the secret weapon is Man, the missile it fires is surprise—but not what most staff officers mean by that word. And so, unlike some unconventional commanders who threw away the book of rules, Skorzeny took care to learn the routine off by heart, if only to foresee what his opponents, being "real" soldiers, would do. His success indicated that shock attack can also overcome general staffs and politicians who live in the past. A soldier, an army, a nation even, may be stunned for long enough to gain one's ends. If you can strike in places and by methods they have not dreamed of, you may have it your own way.

How this simple doctrine can be applied in a world become so vastly complicated stimulates rather than dismays Skorzeny. Size and complexity delay reactions. Now that warfare has become laden with hundreds of divisions and mountains of machinery, there is scope for a flexible form of attack in which weight of arms may be a hindrance.

What can be expected from surprise achieved with the small use of force?

Imagine ourselves back in 1940, *just after Dunkirk. Churchill declares that Britain will fight on, "if necessary alone", but flies to France and makes a final effort to retain his last ally. He fails. France falls into Hitler's hands.*

Recall the scene. Pétain and Weygand, French army chiefs, are bullying their Cabinet into seeking a separate peace with Hitler. They refuse to continue the war or even to surrender their forces in France while allowing a French Government to carry on resistance from overseas. They insist that the entire State surrenders. All the pleadings of Churchill and their own Premier, Reynaud, are in vain. Instead of making a fighting retreat to North Africa, the two generals force an Armistice and usurp the Government.

Should the British have allowed France to break away? Skorzeny's disposal of the two Horthys who wanted to surrender Hungary to Germany's enemies suggests an immediate alternative —the fatal counsellors of the French Cabinet should have been bundled into an R.A.F. plane and flown into captivity.

Then the indomitable Reynaud would have had his way and kept North Africa still an Allied base, with the French battle fleet intact. Even if Germany had burst through Spain to reach Gibraltar, the Mediterranean situation must have been transformed.

His sea lines cut by the Anglo-French fleets, Mussolini's first defeat in Egypt would have brought about the early destruction of his desert armies. Rommel could not have come to the rescue with the Africa Corps. No need for the laborious invasion of Morocco and Algeria; all this region as well as the Tunisian springboard could have stayed in Allied hands with the rest of the French Empire. Italy might have been lambasted at once from close quarters. To attack Gibraltar Hitler would have had to

withdraw aircraft needed in the Battle of Britain and extend his lines through Spain—a peninsula notoriously inhospitable towards foreign conquerors. Even if some of the rosier tints be taken from this picture, it is still in exhilarating contrast with Britain's "darkest hour" after Pétain and Reynaud took over.

These speculations arise from a proposal which seemingly occurred to no one at that time. To kidnap allied personalities, though their behaviour puts everything in jeopardy, may still appear too unorthodox. Yet count the cost of allowing Reynaud's opponents to get their way.

A month after bowing France out of her alliance, the British were shelling the French fleet at Oran in case it fell into Hitler's hands. Objecting to this "murder", Admiral Sir James Somerville had his protest over-ruled because it was believed that Britain's life hung in the balance. What would the slaughter of thirteen hundred French sailors in a bombardment unheralded by a declaration of war sound like in court if victors, as well as vanquished, faced war-crimes tribunals?—and Oran was only one tragedy which might never have occurred if two old Frenchmen had been carried off.

Skorzeny, who himself planned to dispose of Marshal Pétain when he began to obstruct the Germans some three years later, believes that such questions will in the future be settled by the best means available. And if a firm hold be kept on wayward associates, what chivalry will be extended to the enemy? Any tradition that protects political and military leaders is obsolete; indeed, Skorzeny still wonders why the Allies never tried to eliminate the one man whose removal might have stopped the war: it was obvious, from the consternation into which Mussolini's abduction threw Hitler's security chiefs, that they lacked confidence in their ability to defend him. Nor would Skorzeny have hesitated if he had really been ordered to kidnap Eisenhower: he regards every commander-in-chief as fair game, and attainable. The Russians share this viewpoint—Communists have never insisted on their victims wearing uniform. Next time no politician or head of state will sleep too soundly, wherever he be put.

Another conflict may well start with a series of assassinations and disappearances, and this prediction is not so far-fetched as it

During the trial: Skorzeny, "No. 1" among the group of German officers accused together at Dachau, takes notes for their defence.

With his chief Defence Counsel after the trial
On the back of this snapshot is written "For Colonel Otto Skorzeny, a wonderful man and a good friend of mine—Robert D. Durst, Lt.-Col. Cav. 028837."

Skorzeny today. Arriving at a Spanish airport

may sound. An enemy who chose his time would find the White House open; Secret Service men are ready to guard the President against the lunatic or political crank, but they cannot count on stopping a professional attack based on close study of Washington's habits. Often I have walked into Washington's Pentagon Building, with its thousands of generals, admirals and staff officers, and lost my way among its floors and galleries. Downing Street seems easy prey; there are many ways in which the precautions around Britain's chief Ministers could be evaded: casual-seeming, homely ruses. Quite by chance, three friends of mine drove through the front gates of a British atomic establishment without producing permits. Such chances can be made.

More than once in the last war, plans for kidnapping and assassinating German leaders—on one occasion by blowing up a theatre full of top-ranking Nazis—were rejected by the Allied authorities. Such restraint will not be practised another time, especially if the Soviet bloc is involved. We shall not cheer airmen on their way to smash a city while shrinking from the death of an enemy leader. Horrible shocks can be inflicted by a few determined men on the directing brain—and that is bound to be a prime aim of the modern belligerent.

Now let us glance at the North Africa and Italy campaign to find scope for those lightning strokes which, in Skorzeny's words, might overturn a slower-moving adversary. Caution and delay seem to have robbed the Allies of at least two major opportunities.

Tunis, the springboard to Sicily, was struck from the final list of landing-places in North Africa because the planners expected French resistance to be stronger than it was. Huge convoys put armies ashore far to the west, and when the French defenders changed sides there were only weak Allied forces in Tunisia. Marching four hundred miles from Algiers with the vanguard of the British First Army, Lieut.-General Anderson arrived just too late—the Germans had poured in nearly twenty thousand troops with a speed that put the Allies to shame, for some had come from Bavaria and Austria. Thus, with his rear guarded through the long retreat from El Alamein to Tunisia and his supplies made tolerably sure, Rommel was able to hold the Allied pincers apart for six months more.

I have heard Skorzeny say that a thousand Frenchmen could

take Paris overnight if they worked to a surprise plan for seizing Ministries—and Ministers. The Allies had French friends in Tunis. Could they not, the signal being given, have opened the gates to a special force ear-marked for just such a moment? Day after day the springboard to Sicily had been left unguarded: the Allies arrived in strength only to find the approaches barred and locked.

Next, Italy. Mussolini was overthrown on July 26, but it took three full weeks, while German troops swarmed into the country, to smuggle an Italian envoy through occupied France and Spain to meet with Allied agents. Meanwhile, nothing was done and the first word this emissary heard was that nothing could be discussed but unconditional surrender. Then it needed a fortnight for the man to get back to Rome, and another three days for the armistice to be signed. By then Hitler had eighteen divisions in Italy; so that for the King and Badoglio it looked less a question of unconditional surrender than whether they would have anything remaining to surrender at all.

We know now why the windfall offered by Mussolini's arrest was neglected, why the Italians were left, in Churchill's words, to "stew in their own juice". The Allies could not risk the upset of their invasion plan, timed months before for mid-September, and they could think of no other immediate means of profiting from Mussolini's fall. In the end the invasion was brought forward a week, but altogether forty days were lost. Only on the eve of the landings was Eisenhower's aide, General Taylor, sent secretly to arrange with Badoglio for an airborne drop on Rome. Too late: Rome was being overrun, the Royal Family were packed for flight, the airfields near the capital had been lost a few hours earlier. Again the Germans had made up for a late start and got there first.

"We never wavered," writes Eisenhower in defending the Allied course in the Mediterranean. "The doctrine of opportunism . . . is a dangerous one to pursue in strategy." That principle is of course impeccable—since over-all policy cannot chase every will-o'-the-wisp which may appear—but it fails to explain the lack of some resourceful effort, *outside the invasion framework*, to seize Italy when Mussolini fell. Within hours of the long-deferred landings the Allies had lost Mussolini too—and the news that the

Italian dictator had been abducted from his rock by a light glider force offered a contrast that no one could overlook. "*That* is the way to jump in," everyone felt. "*That* is the way to grasp a chance."

The July 20 conspiracy was a classic treason plot; let us see what chances went begging when, with Berlin in disorder, no one knew whether Hitler was alive or dead.

Like most people, Skorzeny expected intervention by the Allies. When action was delayed he still assumed it would come —the enemy *must* have allowed in their planning for the possibility of such a thing. But hours went by, and days, without an Allied move of any sort. The conspiracy was stamped out and the war continued, much as before.

For months after the July 20 bomb went off the world was asking why the Allies did nothing. Every guess was made except the right one: that from start to end they knew everything about the conspiracy; knew all, and did not lift a finger.

July 20 will go down into history as a supreme example of opportunity thrown away. From his briefly held pinnacle at the War Ministry Skorzeny could hardly believe what he saw— that those abroad who stood to gain most from this dislocation did not mean to follow their chance through.

Today, the story and the explanation are clear. We can draw for testimony on Hitler's People's Court; we can call on evidence taken before the Nuremberg tribunal; and we have—in Mr. Allen Welsh Dulles, brother of America's Secretary of State— a uniquely placed witness of the way it all developed.

The roots of this conspiracy reached down to pre-war days. Before Munich, even, six of Hitler's highest officers tried to bring him down. But every time they were nerved to strike, Britain and France let Hitler have the spoils he wanted. War came; when the German armies were driven back in Russia the plot revived.

For eighteen months before July 20 Allen Dulles, working from Switzerland as America's chief agent, was privy to the schemes to get rid of Hitler. Risking death and worse, German couriers went back and forth to tell him every detail of what was planned. Their confidence could not be returned. Although Dulles knew what was being done he had no authority to offer

the support which would have unified the conspirators and given them the fillip they needed. And then, in those hours when Hitler's existence was in doubt, when no one in Germany knew which way to turn, whose orders to obey, the Allies stood aloof and left the German opposition to its fate.

We have seen how Skorzeny feared an airborne drop on Berlin. He believed that one or two divisions could have seized the capital and held it for five days; given a nucleus of special troops and civilian agents in league with the conspirators, a much smaller force would have sufficed. Within that time the Allies could probably have carried off everyone they wanted in Berlin, from Goebbels downwards. At the best, the war might have been won outright. At the worst, a crippling shock would have been inflicted on the régime.

Even the Russians, with none of our advantages at the time, saw that this was no moment to be wasted. Lacking an airborne force in readiness, they sent the renegade German General Seydlitz to the radio to call upon his compatriots. "Turn your guns against Hitler," he cried. "Do not fail these brave men who tried to kill him." After his surrender at Stalingrad, Seydlitz had been fêted by the Russians and persuaded to set up a Free German Committee which appealed to German officers in their own language to throw off Hitler's tyranny. Hardly anything of this sort was attempted by the West, except in a hole-and-corner way, but when the bomb went off everybody waited—in hope or in fear—for a move from London. None came: not even a call to rise or a shower of leaflets. So far from widening the split across Germany, the Allies sealed it up. Once more the "unconditional surrender" demand was brought out with its implications, to the German mind, of ruin and enslavement; and so far from their being supported, the conspirators were left to their fate with a Churchillian "Let dog eat dog!" The entire opposition was cut down by Hitler so mercilessly that it could never grow again. One cannot better Dulles' summing-up: "Those who determined policy in Britain and America seemed to be making the military task as difficult as possible by uniting all Germans to the bitter end."

There was a tragic irony in the doom the German opposition generals brought upon themselves. Revolution, it has been said,

was a manœuvre they never practised in their youth, and now it was too late. They were hampered by tradition and by the military oath which bound them to their destroyer. Time after time they reached the edge of mutiny, then recoiled. Of course, if Hitler were killed—by whatever means—they would be freed from their fealty.

Long before the generals were ready to strike, Hitler's police were running their shears round the edge of the conspiracy; they had almost reached the centre when it exploded. After six years' procrastination the last stage was fatally rushed by those who had survived Hitler's earlier purges. They took it all so fatalistically, these generals, letting their opponent pick them off one by one. Of seventeen field-marshals on the army list when the war started, only one held his baton at the end. Of thirty-five senior generals in 1939, three were left in active posts. All the rest had gone—sacked, hanged, shot or given poison. Even the bold Rommel: too late to aim a blow at Hitler, he had to accept the hemlock from the tyrant's messenger.

Taken out of the groove of honour and obedience, a general may be as lost as a well-drilled private soldier. And not German generals only—when we look back at the North African invasion. So far from hailing Allied deliverance, the French commanders, almost to a man, were ready to drive the Allies back into the sea; when Admiral Darlan, in Marshal Pétain's name, called a cease-fire, they obeyed. The Marshal's word was what mattered; since he, too, had exacted an oath of personal loyalty from his officers. Quite logically, the outstanding exception among French generals, who had followed his own conscience after Dunkirk, was regarded as a treasonable deserter: de Gaulle had broken ranks.

Obedience was the generals' charter, and after the war German generals pleaded at war-crimes trials that they could but follow orders. Churchill, sympathising, sent a cheque to aid Manstein's defence; Field-Marshal Montgomery was quoted by counsel: "I am a soldier. I obey orders." All in vain. In condemning Manstein, Kesselring and the rest, the tribunals laid down that generals should not obey "wrongful" orders—a judgement that seemingly opens the doors to subversion in the highest ranks.

Another July 20 will be made easier by the ruling of these

tribunals. From the first day of the war we shall impress upon the enemy's generals that patriotism points the way to treason, that *we* are their real friends, and that so far from surrender being somehow indivisible, it will be gladly accepted in whole or in part —and "unconditionally". There will be no more gibes like "Let dog eat dog"; instead, we shall constantly assure any opposition leaders of our heartfelt aid in overthrowing the tyranny. Victory, as the soldier-historian Thucydides wrote two thousand odd years ago, is soonest won by those who come as liberators.

It would be easy to draw from two world wars other instances of how the caution that must rule enterprises planned months or even years ahead repeatedly stifled hopes of a quick move to bring down the enemy's main structure. Reasons against prompt action were plausible and weighty—usually they centred on two objections: that all resources had already been committed for other projects and that new moves needed proper consultation with one's allies.

Specific proposals for clearing such obstacles will be advanced later on; but before coming to them it would be useful to examine British experience in this field and, in particular, one type of operations, virtually unknown, to which recent events have lent a sinister topicality.

CHAPTER XVI

Ex Africa semper aliquid novi.
PLINY

A SURPRISING development of World War II was the appearance of so-called private armies, units of a few score men who banded together to carry the war into the enemy's camp. They arose spontaneously when Dunkirk bereft Britain of the means of regular warfare; indeed, it was this need to improvise which first gave licence to these privateers.

With seeming casualness, they sailed in tiny parties to break the spell that had settled over conquered Europe. Sentries were jack-knifed, roads booby-trapped, troop-trains waylaid. In Norway, nine men on skis blew up a heavy-water factory and thus put paid to Hitler's programme for building the atom bomb; from France, a brand-new radar station was levitated across the Channel. These "commandos"—as they quickly became known —worked in a happy-go-lucky partnership with agents behind the lines and with the various resistance movements, which were invigorated by their example of attack.

As time went on most private armies were embodied in the official Commando Brigade. A few survived and flourished as independent units—and chief of these was one which grew to the status of a brigade which roved behind General Rommel's lines in Africa, followed him across the Mediterranean to Italy and later crowned their work by helping to blow the locks and hinges off Hitler's defences in France. When the war ended this remarkable formation was adapting to the Far East theatre a technique which had extorted alarmed respect from Britain's enemies in Europe.

No one has yet ventured to write a history of the Special Air Service. Its early activities must nonplus those who search for origins in War Office records, and the successes of its heyday

were concealed by censorship. But here and there one comes across the traces; startling tales of adventure which seem the less credible when one meets the modest, inoffensive men who lived through them.

"Well, really, I can't tell you much," they say. Then follows an outline of some affair involving one's informant which is the more blood-curdling for its casual recital. With an apology for being dull—"It's rather long ago, now, isn't it?"—he will suggest looking up so-and-so: a pillar of Church or State who was once connected with the S.A.S.

Because the Special Air Service typifies the way the British have of deriving inspiration from catastrophe, its success is an object-lesson for the future. In terms of evolution one might say that it arose from the failure of orthodox "commando" tactics to encompass strategic ends; in human terms it sprang from David Stirling's personality.

I have been assured that Stirling, when war came, was so unwarlike that the outbreak found him thousands of miles from home: with a blend of energy and nonchalance which is characteristic he was riding down the Rocky Mountains on horseback. Returning home to the Scots Guards, he found a way out of routine duties after Dunkirk by joining the crack Commando column, "Layforce".

The unit sailed to the Middle East—the only area where British troops were in action—in January 1941. Something out of the ordinary was planned for Layforce: now that the Italians in North Africa had been trounced, they were to carry out a combined operation against Rhodes.

Before this expedition could start, however, Hitler turned the strategic picture upside down. German armies overran the Balkans; the British were ejected from Greece and Crete; the newly arrived Africa Corps thrust General Wavell's men back four hundred miles through Libya to the frontier of Egypt.

British hopes of clearing the Mediterranean were dispelled by Rommel's threat to Alexandria and the Suez Canal; Wavell could only hold the enemy at arm's length while landing raiders to wreck airfields in his rear. Three such combined operations were launched, but, since every British destroyer was at that time irreplaceable, all three had to be abandoned when the ships ran into

danger. Each time two hundred men or more from Layforce were brought back to port without going ashore. Cairo headquarters concluded that Rommel was armed at all points against small-scale attack; so they stopped the risky game and disbanded Layforce.

Waiting for a ship home, Lieut. David Stirling, encouraged by Brigadier Laycock,* the commander of Layforce, decided with some friends to learn to parachute. They borrowed an old plane one afternoon and took turns jumping from the door. Last to leap, but first to land with a faulty chute, was David Stirling: he whizzed past his floating companions and made a crater in the desert.

A base hospital in the Delta allowed Stirling, still unwilling to be posted home, to follow his predilection for making plans rather than having them made for him. What is called a "military appreciation" was outlined on sheets of paper scattered on his bed. Reasoning from the Layforce experiences, he had reached deductions peculiarly his own: Middle East estimated that the abortive attacks were too small to break through Rommel's defences; Stirling judged them to be too big.

The hit-and-run raid is in Stirling's blood—how else explain his family's survival through incessant wars and Highland blood feuds?—and three centuries of Whitehall rule has failed to quell it. His cousin, young Lord Lovat, was to lead his own commando regiment in raids on the Channel coast. That Rommel's airfields should be inviolate simply because the Middle East lacked air strength to raid them was unthinkable; Stirling had worked out exactly how German airpower could be attacked on the ground, and he meant to do it himself.

His appreciation noted unfavourably Middle East Command's habit of putting in the strongest possible force at a single point. Why convey two hundred commandos in warships to a hostile shore, he argued, for the sake of storming an air base which is not to be held? The real aim was the destruction of its aircraft—and this might be achieved more thoroughly and at slight cost if somehow half a dozen saboteurs could fix timed incendiary bombs

* Before returning to Britain to take over the appointment of Commander, Special Services Brigade (the Commandos), at the age of 34, Laycock accompanied the Keys raid on Rommel's headquarters and was one of the only two survivors.

on the planes. Given two hundred men, this force could be split into little groups which would go for thirty or forty airfields at once. Succeeding at only one place out of four, they would still wreck many times more than the fifty odd planes which is all that could be hoped for by concentrated attack on a single field.

Lack of shipping no longer mattered, because vulnerable vessels need not be endangered. Small parties of saboteurs could land from fishing-boats or submarines, drop from bombers or seek lifts on the reconnaissance cars of the Long Range Desert Group.

Of course, Stirling wrote, such troops must learn to probe their way through hostile areas, and in the dark. Why not, then, raise a new force for these special missions—and what more natural leader for it than the author of the scheme himself?

To this monument of presumption Stirling added an engaging flourish: by recruiting his new force now he would be ready to paralyse Rommel's five main advanced fields on the eve of the next British offensive. It was well known in Cairo that this big push was due in November, only three months ahead.

The pencilled sheets were clipped together, but not posted off. A point underlined in the appreciation was that Stirling should be directly responsible to the C.-in-C.: this, as he blandly indicated, would save the time of innumerable branches and departments. He was starting as he meant to continue: with the attack direct.

A few days pass; the scene changes from the hospital to a guard post at Middle East headquarters. Lacking credentials, Stirling has suffered a rebuff. He hobbles round the corner; and with the aid of crutches which he then discards, hoists his six feet four over the fence and makes groggily for the building. A sentry spots him; he dodges down a corridor into the Adjutant-General's department where he invites a fretful staff officer to read his appreciation. The officer glances through the proposals and tells Stirling not to waste his time.

Some minutes later Stirling has invaded the office of the Deputy Chief of the General Staff. Lieut.-General Ritchie protests against this intrusion, but finds himself reading the paper. Reaching the last page, he praises the new scheme: it is exactly what the situation needs.

Three days later Stirling is in the presence of his Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Claude Auchinleck. He leaves as a captain; to make a start and recruit his force at once.

But the rearing of Stirling's brain-child was not to be so easy as its birth. First of all the staff of Middle East Headquarters had to be conciliated or overcome. Furious at Stirling's impudence, and outraged by its reward, the obstructionists decided to ignore the foundling laid on their doorstep: it could starve. But they did not yet know what they were up against. In a remark made by Stirling in a letter to a friend after the war, one can almost catch an echo from rebellious Friedenthal, of Skorzeny and Radl discussing how to outwit the "main enemy" in Berlin: "While most of the branches could be helpful at the top," Stirling wrote, "they were astonishingly tiresome at middle and lower levels. In the Adjutant-General's branch, which was obstructive right up to the top, it was only by invoking the authority of General Ritchie that I could ever get my way."

But even an appeal to Caesar can be stultified—and then he took the law into his own hands. Smugly informed he would get no encampment for at least six months, he invited his friends out in a borrowed lorry. At nightfall they fell upon a tented village guarded by troops while its owners, a Commonwealth detachment, were out on an exercise. Three trips were made before dawn and next day Stirling's unit was installed in a lavishly equipped camp re-erected at Kabrit in the Canal Zone.

Officers on whom Stirling had his eye might not be so informally acquired, but he got them. Paddy Mayne, an affably aggressive Irishman, was rescued from an infantry base where he had been having a difference with his company commander. Jock Lewis was extracted from the Welsh Guards. Bill Cumper, a master of explosives whose trail they followed all over the Middle East, was run to earth in a depot where Stirling found him dispensing sanitary fittings.

What should they call themselves? On the paper strength at G.H.Q. was an imaginary force known as the Special Air Service, its invention intended to persuade Rommel that the British had an airborne brigade in the Middle East where none was. To lend colour to the imposture dummy troops were dropped near prisoner-of-war cages and captives reported this in coded letters

home. Mock gliders were also lined up where they could be photographed by visiting planes. Meeting the brigadier in charge of this deception, Stirling offered to adopt the S.A.S. banner and bear it convincingly into action. The deal was done.*

Former members of Layforce furnished the phantom S.A.S. brigade with its first flesh-and-blood detachment. "Establishment" was seven officers and sixty men, of whom twelve were N.C.O.s, for Stirling had from the first sub-divided his force into units of four men with an officer or N.C.O. to each. This splitting of the military atom was designed to release latent energies—independence, pugnacity, imagination.

Training was imbued with tremendous urgency: it was often said that Jock Lewis, who devised the programme, had schemed for everything except time to sleep. Marching 100 miles, back-roll jumping from a lorry at full tilt, close-quarter shooting, hardening the nerves with closer and bigger explosions—to men who had already gone through the Commando mill Lewis offered a post-graduate course. Parades at Kabrit vied with St. Moritz for the array of splints, bandages and plaster. A broken leg rated sick leave but a broken arm need not exempt one from marching; nor was exemption sought. Three months at "Stirling's Rest Camp", as the Kabrit centre was whimsically known, and man had nothing left to fear. Soon Stirling commanded a dozen fighting teams that moved like one man as they practised stealing through troop areas and juggled with wire-cutters and time-bombs in the dark.

As a dress rehearsal, the S.A.S. marched ninety miles to raid the British air base of Heliopolus. They got through the guards, and pasted all the aircraft with messages declaring that they had been destroyed. Stirling had proved G.H.Q.'s security arrangements a farce, which did not endear him to those whose charge it was.

* Strong is the magic carried by a name: long after the origin of this title had been forgotten, Stirling was to be haunted by its association with parachutes and gliders. The S.A.S. quickly proved their mission was completely distinct from the work of regular airborne forces and that it was not even dependent on air transport, but still the name, and its associations, remained. A similar fallacy, that their sole aim was to attack airfields, arose because for a start Stirling concentrated on reducing the three-to-one enemy air superiority in the Middle East. As the Germans were rapidly to learn, the S.A.S. were not at all restricted either in their method of approach or to any special target behind the lines. But last of all to understand the S.A.S. rôle was the War Office in London, where the Special Air Service was eventually acknowledged—and placed under the control of Airborne Forces.

On November 19, 1941, the long-promised British offensive was launched, and with it, the first S.A.S. operation—aimed at smashing the whole German desert fighter force with the use of sixty men. Everything was against the raiders. Obsolete aircraft, lacking direction-finding instruments, were all that could be spared to fly the S.A.S. over Rommel's lines; a thirty-mile-an-hour wind whipped the desert into a sandstorm and scattered the parachutists miles from their targets. One of the planes which went astray landed in error on the very German airfield it was scheduled to attack and its party were made prisoner. Of the sixty men who set out, twenty-two got back to Kabrit.

This should have ended the story. Few could have survived such an unrelieved fiasco—and the complacency with which the news was heard in certain Cairo offices. But a month later, to the astonishment of his critics, Stirling tried again, this time keeping the survivors of his unit on the ground and leading them through the open desert flank in the south. Days went by before G.H.Q. was shaken by an incredible report: carried to within striking range of their chosen airfields by the Long Range Desert Group, the S.A.S. had destroyed nearly a hundred German planes. When R.A.F. photographs confirmed the news, chortling in the "middle and lower levels" came to an abrupt end.

Before Rommel could fathom this menace, the unit sprang a score more attacks behind his lines—raids, coolly planned and brilliantly executed, on road convoys, depots, and above all the priority target, airfields. Within three months, the S.A.S. destroyed more aircraft than any fighter squadron of the R.A.F.

Surprise was the key; imagine such a raid. Sentries patrol the wired-in perimeter of a German air base. From the airport roof machine-gunners scan the darkness with night-glasses. Hundreds of miles behind the battle-line, such precautions seem overdone—but this is a base which has already been visited by the S.A.S. and chances are no longer taken.

The silence is split by an explosion—that is the only warning. Flames shoot from a parked bomber and one after another the dark shapes of aircraft burst open like fire-crackers. Sirens howl; searchlights reveal men racing in all directions—some are guards, some raiders—while more and more planes explode. In the midst of this bedlam Stirling and his men are perfectly at home; they

go about their work in a chaos foreseen, calculated. As a fuel dump roars skywards the visitors depart, tossing their last bombs through a mess window or planting them among the crowded lorries near the gates.

Of all the discoveries in his new trade, the most satisfactory for Stirling was the small number of men he lost in what were reputed to be suicide raids. Confusion was his screen.

Rommel doubled and redoubled his guards. When he put a sentry on every plane, the sentry would be blown up too. At one airbase near Benghazi, Italian troops were matched by a strong German detachment on the other side of the tarmac; when the S.A.S. concluded their visit the two sets of defenders were hotly firing at each other across the wreckage of their planes.

Rumours of these goings on swept the Middle East, attracting to Kabrit more and more of the quick-thinking men the S.A.S. wanted to enlist. Stirling also made use of trips to Cairo for casual proselytising; a typical encounter is described by his kinsman Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, M.P.

"David was a tall, dark, strongly-built young man with a manner that was usually vague, but sometimes extremely alert. He asked me what my plans were. I told him. 'Why not join the Special Air Service Brigade?' he said. I asked what it was. He explained that it was not really a brigade; it was more like a platoon. It was only called a brigade to confuse the enemy. But it was a good thing to be in. He had raised it himself . . .

"He went on to elaborate his ideas on small-scale raiding. They were most illuminating. We could operate in the desert first of all; then in southern and eastern Europe. Small parties could be dropped there by parachute and then picked up on the coast by submarine. There were endless possibilities."

Maclean joined the S.A.S. and one of the missions he describes was a call on Benghazi harbour, when with Stirling and Randolph Churchill—another newcomer—he bluffed his way through all the defences of the port in a Ford station wagon painted with the Axis identification stripe. Maclean sums up:

"David, for his part, brought to these ventures the striking power and, to their planning and execution, what Lawrence has called 'the irrational tenth' . . . like the kingfisher flashing across the pool: a never-failing audacity, a gift of daring improvisation,

which invariably took the enemy by surprise. . . . Working on these lines, David achieved, in the months that followed, a series of successes which surpassed the wildest expectations of those who had originally supported the venture. No sooner was one operation completed than he was off on another. No sooner had the enemy become aware of his presence in one part of the desert and set about taking counter-measures than he was attacking them somewhere else, always where they least expected it. . . . In order to protect their rear the enemy were obliged to bring back more and more front-line troops. And all this was done with a handful of men, a few pounds of explosive and a few rounds of ammunition.

"One thing, perhaps, contributed more than anything else to the success of these operations: that David both planned them and carried them out himself, and that, in the early days at any rate, every man in the unit had been picked by him personally."*

A supreme chance came early in May 1942, when battered Malta was waiting for a convoy. Rommel's air force commanded most of the route from Alexandria and Intelligence had pinpointed nine bases from which his bombers would fly. Seven were along the coast of Libya; two more straddled the Mediterranean in Crete. The Director of Military Operations in Cairo said that if Stirling could help to keep down Rommel's air force during the coming battle it might affect the course of events throughout the Mediterranean.

Stirling saw a turning-point in the affairs of S.A.S. He suggested that G.H.Q. were asking rather a lot of a unit without proper status: would it not look better if the war in the Mediterranean were saved by a regiment instead of by a freelance detachment? The general retorted that British regiments were not created every day. Anyway the S.A.S. would be broken up at the end of the war with all the other Commando and parachute battalions: what could they offer that the Army lacked?

Unabashed, Stirling expounded his faith in the S.A.S. technique; it was something entirely new which would have wide use in the future. Commandos and paratroops could be made out of ordinary infantry, but only exceptional troops carefully trained could carry out the S.A.S. rôle—nor could they be controlled through

* Brig. Fitzroy Maclean: *Eastern Approaches.*

the usual military hierarchy which understood nothing of this delicate new medium. The unit must always be responsible for its own planning and their directive must come from the very top.

The general protested that Stirling seemed keener on establishing his damned regiment than on the business of winning the war. "In my view, sir," said Stirling, "the two objects coincide."

Seven of the nine enemy airfields were attacked on the same night, those in Crete being reached by two parties who paddled ashore from a submarine to clamber over the mountains with knapsacks full of bombs. About seventy-five planes in all were destroyed; many more grounded. A signal of congratulations from Middle East Headquarters was addressed to "Commanding Officer, 1st S.A.S. Regiment."

With this accolade, and an expanded force more than three hundred strong, the regiment got going just at the time when there appeared from over the Atlantic an accessory which the S.A.S. promptly seized on: the agile and far-ranging Jeep. Soon the whole regiment was on wheels. Colonel Stirling "had by now given it a cap-badge, a blue affair with a white commando dagger and the words 'Who Dares Wins' beneath it. All his men were parachute-trained . . . and with the cap-badge went a pair of wings, which officers and men who had done exceptionally well on operations were allowed to wear on their chest. When he considered that he had done well enough, Stirling awarded them to himself. One day, on the steps of Shepheard's, he met General Auchinleck.'Good heavens, Stirling,' said the General. 'What's that you have on?' 'Our operational wings, Sir,' replied Stirling, saluting smartly.

" 'Well, well,' observed the General, 'and very nice, too . . . very nice, too.'

"The insignia of the Special Air Service had received its official blessing."*

In September 1943, while the armies were stalemated at El Alamein, Stirling led the most ambitious—and least successful—of his missions, a battalion-strength raid on Benghazi. He took his troops round on a seventeen-hundred-mile circuit of the desert, only to be driven back with heavy losses, in vehicles if not in men.

* John Lodwick: *The Fillibusters.*

More in the S.A.S. style was a secret base set up deep in Rommel's rear from which armed Jeeps went raiding. They switched their attacks from landing-grounds to radio stations, from road convoys to bomb dumps, from the desert railway back again to airfields. Patrols often lived behind the lines for two or three months at a stretch.

After Rommel's defeat at El Alamein, Stirling ranged behind his lines of retreat, blasting his depots, harrying his convoys; for come what might, the Africa Corps must be kept on the run past El Agheila, where the terrain narrowed. Sixteen S.A.S. subbases sprung up behind El Agheila to help in cutting the veins and arteries of Rommel's supply while the Eighth Army drove him back. El Agheila duly fell; Rommel retreated towards Tripoli, with the S.A.S. still behind his lines. To avoid their pestilential nightly raids the German convoys were forced on to the roads by day, when the R.A.F. took over the attack.

With the end of the African campaign in sight, Stirling was preparing to carry death and devastation into Hitler's Europe. The first regiment had grown to five hundred officers and men, including the Special Boat Section and a Greek squadron for raids across the Eastern Mediterranean; and already an S.A.S. group had flown to Algiers to raise their banner of the Flying Dagger there. Soon, under Stirling's brother, Colonel "Bill", a second regiment had been formed in French North Africa. Newcomers who inquired what those initials stood for were told: "S.A.S.? Stirling and Stirling, naturally."

And so it happened that early in 1943, while their respective main forces were still hundreds of miles apart, patrols from the two Special Air Service regiments linked the Allies across Africa.

Just as this seal was set on David Stirling's work he was trapped on a sortie hundreds of miles inside the enemy lines and became one of the best-guarded prisoners in Germany. In the Rommel Papers his adversary gives tribute to "the most adaptable commander of the desert group which caused us more damage than any other British unit of equal strength".

Stirling's war was over barely two years after his arrival in the Middle East as an unfledged subaltern aged twenty-five—and, as luck would have it, just when Otto Skorzeny began to twist the Allied tail. Some of his ruses to stupefy the enemy were very like

Skorzeny's. On the night of the Malta convoy raids German guards drove a group of French prisoners up to Rommel's most impregnable desert airfield; not until next day's investigation amid the wreckage was it discovered that both Frenchmen and Germans were from the S.A.S. Stirling had enlisted a squadron of French paratroopers at Kabrit: the "guards" belonged to a troop of anti-Nazi volunteers and many of them had served in the German army before the war.

Major Paddy Blair Mayne, Stirling's successor in command and perhaps the only man who has ever destroyed more than a hundred aircraft, added great lustre to the S.A.S. name. Another of his lieutenants was Earl Jellicoe, who after parachuting into Rhodes to induce the Italians to surrender (he found six thousand Germans in possession and left in some haste) went on with his Special Boat Squadron to lead raiding forces which freed half of Greece. Jellicoe's arrival in Athens helped avert civil war. Another British "irregular" with something of the Skorzeny touch was Fitzroy Maclean. To quell an anti-British conspiracy in Persia he kidnapped the commander of Isfahan; a decade later, by one of history's paradoxes, this General Zahedi overthrew Premier Mossadeq and brought the British back. Maclean's next task parachuted him into Jugoslavia at the head of a military mission which was joined by Randolph Churchill. On their estimate that Tito would in the long run put the welfare of his country before loyalty to Stalin, Britain supported the Partisans. Fitzroy Maclean was a professional diplomat. So, today, is Jellicoe; demobilised as a colonel at twenty-six, he entered the Foreign Service in time to take part in the first post-war mission to Moscow. Here were two of the S.A.S. leaders who understood the place of politics in war.

After the S.A.S. had linked the Allied armies, the bureaucratic battle which David Stirling won in Cairo had to be fought all over again by his brother in Algiers. Eisenhower's headquarters were almost as suspicious of the S.A.S. as the Middle East had been; amid elaborate arrangements for taking Sicily, Bill Stirling's plan for sowing his 2nd S.A.S. regiment all over the island could be carried out only in token form.

For the invasion of Italy itself Bill Stirling meant to drop the

whole 2nd S.A.S. between Florence, Bologna and Spezia, where the main railways to Rome were open to attack, for it was down these lines that the Germans were hurrying their troop-trains to meet the Allied invasion. Delays and doubts in Algiers whittled this expedition to a mere twenty men with knapsacks of explosives. Five minutes after landing the party lost their leader. Command was taken over by red-haired Anthony Greville-Bell, one of Stirling's youngest subalterns, who found himself in charge of what should have been a crucial thrust of the campaign. The raiders managed to derail fourteen trains, but distances were too great for them to keep the lines out of action as fast as they were repaired. If the whole regiment had been used, the railway system could have been halted for two or three weeks.

Cheated of this superb opportunity, most of the S.A.S. were landed in the toe of Italy, where they took the first prisoners of the invasion before darting off into the blue by Jeep. At one time four groups were at large, laying waste German airfields, blasting convoys or landing by sea behind the lines to attack the Adriatic railway. It was a sign of the enemy's impotent fury that S.A.S. men caught by the Gestapo were henceforth in danger of execution. But the S.A.S. prefers today to remember more cheerful incidents of their Italian sojourn, such as the French troop who commandeered a train and drove it through hostile territory until they reached a concentration camp; the train being loaded with released prisoners, they returned in triumph through the lines.

Towards the end of the campaign Italian guerrillas and escaped Russian prisoners were enlisted behind the lines into an "Allied S.A.S. Battalion" which struck at Kesselring's main supply system and bade fair to turn his last retreat into rout. In that spring of 1945, Major Farran made a precipitate attack on German Fifth Corps headquarters, killing the general with several of his officers and burning down their buildings: a piece of brigandage unsurpassed in the war.

Early in 1944, the whole corps were brought home to reorganise for the cross-Channel invasion—and yet a third set of authorities had to be taught the proper rôle of strategic attack troops. Bill Stirling insisted on the S.A.S. being dropped far in the rear of the enemy, where they would have room to move and space to receive reinforcements by air; his adversaries, on the other

hand, wanted to use the corps close behind the front, where they could not even be supplied. So embittered became the arguments that Stirling relinquished his command after he had won his point. Face being thus saved, the authorities allowed his successor, Colonel Brian Franks, D.S.O., to reap the benefit.

For D-Day the expanded S.A.S. had its own battle order:

1st S.A.S. Regiment	2nd S.A.S. Regiment
3rd (French) Regiment	4th (French) Regiment

1st Belgian (Independent) Regiment.

The S.A.S. always had a slightly exotic aspect, enrolling all and any foreigners who had the right idea. David Stirling had promised the French and Belgians that one day they would fight on their own soil again, and now the day had come.

The cross-Channel operation was of astonishing size and vigour. Most of the brigade, as Bill Stirling had insisted, parachuted deep into France or were landed by plane with their Jeeps and guns at freshly captured airstrips to infiltrate the lines. Sometimes in loose liaison with the Maquis, more often alone, the S.A.S. struck at trains, ammunition dumps and fuel depots in the midst of troop areas; they ambushed lorries and shot up staff cars—well over a thousand German vehicles were destroyed.

Within a week of D-Day no road or railway from Brittany to Switzerland was safe. Strategic reserve troops from the Pas de Calais who were needed in Normandy had to hurry instead to areas like Dijon and Rheims, where S.A.S. squadrons were motoring about in British uniform. Reversing custom, the S.A.S. often travelled by daylight, when Allied bombers drove most enemy traffic off the roads. Night was the time for ambush.

After Patton's break-through at Avranches, S.A.S. troops behind the lines were often mistaken for the spearhead of the main armies. Beaulieu radar station, for instance, was blown up by a German garrison who made off under the fire of a small group of S.A.S. because they thought that Montgomery's tanks were close behind. All over France the Germans were harassed by rumours of imminent attack. Thus the S.A.S. came into its own, happily at work in a whirlwind of doubt and fear, killing five thousand or so Germans before they gave up counting. For months they lived amid the enemy in one of the most thickly

populated countries of Europe, getting into tight corners and usually out of them again—a Robin Hood existence which lacked for nothing, for even cigarettes and letters from home were delivered by the R.A.F.

After the Battle for Germany, the S.A.S. sailed to Norway to disarm a quarter of a million Germans. That was their last task, and the last news most of their friends had of the brigade and of their methods of playing a game which they were the likelier to win since no other team understood the rules.

Such, at least, was the belief of the few people who were interested in the S.A.S.—until a day in March 1954 upset our comfortable assumptions. It was on that morning that I read a report that the Indo-Chinese Communists claimed to have destroyed seventy-eight American aircraft and so pulled off "the greatest victory ever scored by the People's Army in Viet-Nam".

The attack was calculated to inflict the utmost diplomatic as well as military damage. For weeks, in the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu, twenty thousand troops had been beleaguered: the world followed the struggle with agonised attention, since on its issue might depend not only the fate of the garrison but also the questions of peace and war in the Far East which were due to be discussed at a conference of Powers at Geneva. Dien Bien Phu had become symbolic of French resistance, and America ferried aircraft thousands of miles to keep the stronghold going.

Hopes in the West were high when the blow fell: not on the battle-field where all eyes were fixed, but far behind it on the two main air bases in Indo-China. Censored French reports admitted that enough damage had been done to cut off, at a critical time, the equivalent of a full division's air supplies each week. Dien Bien Phu, which had counted on holding out until the monsoon, was in deadly jeopardy again. Politicians said the timing of the attack pointed to staff work on the Kremlin level, but in my opinion the *manner* of the stroke was more disconcerting still. Take this message from Hanoi:

"Black-clad Viet-Minh Communists crept into a French military airport early today and planted plastic bombs on bombers and communication planes. It was the second such raid in three days. Airfields have been put on the alert throughout Indo-China. A

concerted attack on French air power could threaten the slender supply-line to half a dozen vital places and above all to Dien Bien Phu."

A second message reported:

"Again the Communists have got away with a major raid on an American-equipped and staffed airlift base—this time at Haipong, which is one of the most important supply centres in the north. Transports and airliners were blown up on the tarmac. Firing brought American airmen tumbling from their beds in a near-by barracks, but although the Reds' leader was captured wounded after a ten-minutes' battle in the middle of the runway, the rest of the raiding party got away."

And again a cable from Haipong:

"Despite doubled sentries and increased precautions of every kind, Communists again tricked the French by marching through their lines in full military order and wearing French uniform; some of them even exchanged hails with the guards they passed. They were mistaken for normal patrols and allowed to reach the dispersal areas where a score of American 'flying boxcars'—the great twin-tailed C119s—were parked. A few minutes later everything went up in smoke and flames as incendiary bombs exploded. Only five of the attackers were accounted for. The rest escaped in the confusion.

"These last two raids have revealed a disgraceful lack of security. They have probably done more damage than an attack at division strength—and for negligible Communist losses. This worrying new Communist strategy is undermining American efforts to keep the French army in the field and may prove a decisive element in the issue of the war."

That was how "the greatest victory ever scored by the People's Army in Viet-Nam" was won. Change a few names and we are back in the Western Desert, visiting Rommel's air bases with David Stirling and Paddy Mayne. The approach on foot with wire-cutters, the hand-placed bombs, the nice use of confusion which evoked that age-old lament of commanders taken by surprise: "A disgraceful lack of security!" Add to this parallel the march through the lines in enemy uniform—and there could be no more doubt in my mind about the sources of this "new Communist strategy" than there was in Crusoe's when he saw

the footprint on the beach of his desert island. Here, too, were "toes, heel, and every part of a foot": these Viet-Minh attacks showed that the Russians who had tried to kidnap Skorzeny were already borrowing the tricks they could not steal—and not from him alone.

The crippling of air strength on the ground was a lesson torn out of the S.A.S. book: nothing of the sort had been done before and nothing like it since. But to appraise its true significance the man for my money was David Stirling. I had long intended to meet him, and these reports added further point to that determination. Stirling, like Skorzeny, had skirmished in the realms of future warfare: "strategic aims with limited forces" were what he had lived and fought for. But, also like Skorzeny, Stirling was never to be found. Mutual friends heard from him in Africa and sometimes from New York; he had been seen, splendidly arrayed, at the Abbey Coronation, and then was lost to sight again.

Dien Bien Phu surrendered, and then, one morning, Jellicoe dropped into my office. "If you are still looking for David Stirling," he said, "I hear he is to be in London soon. Why not ring up his mother? She will know." He gave me a London number, and Stirling, who might have been anywhere, came to the telephone himself.

CHAPTER XVII

The world belongs to the enthusiast who keeps cool.
WILLIAM MCFEE

As soon as I met David Stirling, the extraordinary stories I had heard about him became easy to believe. Here, in the urbane atmosphere of St. James's, was the man of whom a Middle East comrade-in-arms had written: "Young, tall, good-looking, he had become (much against his naturally modest disposition) the romantic figure of the war. . . . With a light heart and cool courage, he inspired in his men a passionate devotion and led them to thrilling adventures. Where we plodded, he pranced."*

A dozen years have gone by and, at thirty-seven, Stirling's mind still canters ahead of his contemporaries'—in a political and human sphere far removed from war-making. Africa is still his battle-field, but the new enemies are racial wretchedness and much ignoble indifference. His reach, as ever, is a long one: from a desk in his adopted home, Rhodesia, he is leading a movement of his own creation to unite in common citizenship all the territories and peoples between Abyssinia and the Union, an ambition which is pursued by means that seem eminently shrewd and practical.

A man of fashion who makes few concessions to fashionable thought, Stirling still possesses to the full an instinct for action: "the obvious thing to do" becomes obvious to other people, as a rule, less quickly. I found no relenting of that volcanic force which made his "romanticism" work during the war, although the years have widened his understanding of men and their affairs. As a matter of course, he knows everyone worth knowing —particularly those whose influence may help forward his scheme for a new federal Dominion free of racial discrimination. And

* Lieut.-Col. Peniakoff, D.S.O.: *Popski's Private Army.*

another puzzle was explained at this first meeting. If people find themselves, as I had been told, doing what David Stirling wants without always knowing why, it is by virtue of that same conviction which enabled him while in his twenties to impress his ideas on high-ranking officers and, day by day, to translate them into action.

Of the reports from Indo-China revealing the Communists' "new strategy" he said at once that there could be no two opinions. The deadly similarity between his own technique and the Viet-Minh's left him no room for doubt. Airfield raids on the S.A.S. model could be carried off only by men carefully trained for operations demanding the utmost precision and the sort of leadership and preparation which took much time to perfect.

As we sat over our shepherd's pie at White's, Stirling went on to discuss what had become of the Special Air Service since the war. He left his German prison camp in time to lead the brigade on what would have been their biggest operation; the S.A.S., based on Chungking, were to have loosened Japan's hold on her empire by severing all communications between China and Malaya. But before the brigade could sail, the Far East war was snuffed out by the atom bomb.

And then, what had been foreseen duly happened. Peace had arrived, danger was past, the military mould resumed its shape. Farewell and a brief thanks to the private armies. The Commandos were swallowed by the Royal Marines, the S.A.S. were disbanded—it was as if they had never been. The last piece of wisdom learned was the first to be forgotten.

Stirling left England to make his new life; but others who remained here tried to revive the S.A.S. Headed by Colonel Brian Franks, they called on the authorities to salvage this reserve of British energy, daring and hard-won skill. A kind of grocer's bill was drawn up to show a nation of shopkeepers what a bargain they were throwing away. The debit side looked like this:

In all the desert fighting, 20 men killed.

In the whole war, 1st and 2nd S.A.S. Regiments lost 150 officers and men—44 of them in air crashes, not in fighting.

Aircraft lost in five years: seven.

Equipment costs, trivial. The one extravagance: high explosive.

At paltry cost the nation had acquired a weapon which destroyed hundreds of aircraft and thousands of vehicles, and earned an incalculable profit in demoralising the enemy. Had the proper use of the S.A.S. been understood from the start, Franks and his friends argued, costs would have been even less and profits immensely higher.

But the Government, public, and even some military writers, were absorbed in matters such as the restoration of full dress to the Brigade of Guards and walking-out "blues" for regiments of the Line. They were not interested in keeping a small and inexpensive insurance policy going.

It was not until Stalin put his hands on Czechoslovakia and started the Berlin blockade, that a chastened Whitehall began to listen. In 1950 the S.A.S. rose from the ashes of its glory—as a territorial regiment. Taking over the City of London quarters, and some of the traditions, of the Artists' Rifles, it became the only territorial unit to be manned wholly by volunteers. Soon news must have got about that the S.A.S. promised something beyond the regular drill-hall syllabus, for bankers, clerks, commercial travellers and others who seldom haunt recruiting centres in peace-time were queueing up to join. Today the Army is faced with a phenomenon: while traditional units have to beg for men, this young regiment is always turning them away. A second regiment was later raised to fight the Communists in Malaya, where it has stayed.

One must be thankful, in Stirling's view, for the "reactivation" of the S.A.S., although it is but a shadow of what might have been. But even if half of it were not composed of night-school enthusiasts with a fortnight's camp a year while the other half is hemmed in by the Malayan jungle, the present corps would still lack the top-level planning and imaginative handling needed to save soldiers from rehearsing for the last world war instead of for the next.

At this first meeting David Stirling entered into my views on the confusing and conflicting policies abroad. And at several later discussions Stirling, in turn, spoke of his concern for our perilously narrow safety margin.

At one and the same time, he pointed out, the British Army

were trying to keep an armoured force in Germany, to patrol distant parts of the Commonwealth with what was really an over-stretched police force, and to build up a reserve at home. This reserve was not, however, intended to protect these islands, but for overseas emergencies, and if air invasion of Britain came we would not have a single division to fend it off. Already the Army had been forced, during the British Guiana scare, to withdraw men from the Queen's ceremonial guard at Balmoral. If this be our peace-time state, what problems would war bring?

First in the line of fire, our army thinly spread over the world, our defences like match-boarding against the weight of the assault they would have to withstand, we should be faced by an enemy proof against sea blockade; mighty in tanks, artillery, the air arm and nuclear knowledge; above all, matchless in that basic commodity of war-making, men. As to attack from the air, no fighters-and-guided-missiles screen could ward off the broadside of robot weapons, worse by far than the V1s and V2s which Hitler had only started to use in 1945, which might be poured across the Channel night and day. Against the atom-bomber the only real answer was the 100 per cent. interception—and for every bomber destroyed, the experts reckoned that one or more would get through to these crowded islands. Who could be sure, if Russia struck, that the first battle, which we contrive always to lose, would not also be the last?

Stirling flew back to Rhodesia with a copy of my narrative on Skorzeny's war-time operations. Some time later he wrote:

". . . You have established the way in which our technique of strategic attack behind the lines was adapted by Skorzeny and turned to brilliant account against us. This record leaves us wondering whether the endless potentialities of this technique in another war are being developed more vigorously by the Russians than they are in the Western world.

"The British have always had a marked capacity for inventiveness, and an equal capacity for putting a new idea to practical use. Our fault is that we are too often casual about exploiting fully the advantages of our enterprise. A classic example of this failing is, of course, the tank. Having invented the tank in the First World War, we neglected its development until its real

possibilities were dramatically demonstrated to us by Hitler's Panzer divisions in the first round of the Second World War. . . ."

I remember pausing here to meditate on this uncomfortable parallel. Who does not know the story of the tank?—and yet it has not been taken thoroughly to heart. In 1917 Churchill got the tank built in the teeth of Army opposition. Then, instead of hoarding their new weapon for that surprise break-through which masses of infantry could not effect, the generals used it in dribs and drabs which let Germany into the secret. At the end of that war, in 1918, this British tool of victory was put aside to rust; there it was left until Hitler brought it up to date. In 1940, after we had been assured that we had on the Continent the finest and best-equipped army Britain had ever possessed, a travesty of a British armoured force was smashed by the weapon we had invented a quarter of a century before.

Must history be repeated? Would we again, resting on fading battle honours, let others take over and develop our own inventions? Stirling's letter bluntly suggested that our neglect of the strategic assault weapon would indeed be repeating that earlier mistake.

"Certainly," he continued, "our military thinking in this field seems to be restricted within the limits of the experience gained by us in the last war, whereas the Russians are likely to have moved ahead of it—on from the further stage at which the Germans under Skorzeny left off. We have now the warning of Indo-China where Communists, dependent on Soviet training, have imitated our methods to the life. These airfield raids leading up to the fall of Dien Bien Phu were merely the first overt move of an organisation which is unlikely to reveal its secrets in a minor theatre of war.

"As you know, the Red Army captured full German intelligence accounts of British work in this field and they also must have knowledge of Skorzeny's many missions. The scope of this type of warfare has been immeasurably widened by the advent of atomic weapons since then. In the late war the individual's ability to destroy vital centres behind the lines was only a fraction of what it may be in the next. . . . Let us hope that the publication of your book will encourage our authorities to reconsider their attitude to special operations of the Skorzeny type. That they

should do so is as important from a defensive as it is from an offensive standpoint. If we have lagged behind in our study of the offensive use of this technique, it is axiomatic that our defensive measures are likely to be dangerously inadequate. . . .

"In my view, there should be set up at the War Office a directorship of strategic assault personnel. The terms of reference of this new directorship would enable it to straddle the watershed between the para-military operation carried out by troops in uniform and the political warfare which is conducted by civilian agents.

"It would be the primary task of the director to plan operations within the widest scope of the highly diversified force at his disposal. In this planning he would make full use of all current military and political intelligence for the selection of his targets and the assessment of their priority. Some of these targets might change from time to time following re-alignments of policy; others would retain importance, but the methods of attacking them would be constantly under review. A large part of this force would have always to be in a high state of readiness, day by day, for specific tasks.

"A director of vision and boldness, backed by the Chiefs of Staff and with full Government support, might even stop a war before conventional operations were under way. We can be sure that the existence of such a force in a constant state of readiness would, at relatively small cost, be a major deterrent to any aggressor.

"That is all I have to say—except to wish your book success. It is important that it should be widely read and that its implications should be squarely faced by those in authority."

The proposals were typical of Stirling in their realism and simplicity, and he added a provocative postscript: were there no Skorzeny it would be necessary to invent one if only to display the versatility of his "secret weapon—Man." I passed this on to Madrid and received a prompt reply.

"It is only in the West," Skorzeny wrote, "that books must be published to advocate new military ideas. You may be sure that in Russia there is no need for such publicity. Foreign innovations are taken carefully to pieces like German magnetic mines used to be at the start of the sea war against England—and then re-

assembled in a way to fit the newer needs. To an outsider, at least, the proposals for a corps of special assault troops seem admirable in every way: there is no question but that such a British initiative would be widely welcomed in the West."

We cannot sit down and wait for war to abolish itself, nor can we leave our fate in others' hands. But Britain has two blessings to be grateful for: if attack has shot ahead of defence, a defensive strategy has never been natural to us; and, if the raw material of Russian strategy is manpower, that of ours is skill and quality. We can invent sharp weapons, and we breed men to use them well—if they are encouraged to.

The term strategy is too often used to connote invasions, flanking movements and armoured drives; bombing came into the picture only when the air marshals set out to show that they could influence events through sheer destruction. But, besides armies and fleets of ships and aircraft, there are other instruments of strategy. On the sabotage of a single bridge span a decisive battle may turn; a box of matches can burn down a headquarters, a well-placed ear acquire more secrets than long-range air reconnaissance. It is with this sort of strategic potentiality in mind that Stirling proposes a directorship of strategic assault which will put under one central agency, set high among the makers of strategy, the dash and steel of the S.A.S. and the bold cunning of civilian specialists behind the enemy's lines. The evolution of the "private army" into a highly tempered strategic force packed with hitting power and speed and unhindered by frontiers or battle-fronts, is an enterprise in which Britain, once again, can lead the way.

Planning is all important: it should be directed by someone of wide knowledge—political and economic, as well as military—and with a mind audacious and resolute. We do not lack such individuals, either among generals on the active list or among former officers now in civil life. And for correct planning, information should be complete. The man who is to direct a secret strategy running beyond and even ahead of, as it were, official policy, and who furthermore commands both the strategic assault troops and the disguised agents—the Yeo-Thomases of the future—obviously needs to know every single thing that is

going on: he must have immediate access to all the springs of Intelligence—military, political and economic. Stirling sees the Director as a general who is in a position not only to meet attack instantly but even to anticipate it by beating the aggressor to the draw. If ever it became known that a madman in a seat of power had decided to use the Bomb, such a force might offer the only means and the only hope of stopping him.

It would not be difficult to turn the proposals into fact: the existing S.A.S., already properly established, provides a core from which expansion could proceed; while the principles upon which the directorate and the corps should work have been broadly indicated. Agreement may be expected on most questions involved. Here are the fundamental ones:

What are the authorities likely to think of these proposals?

The War Office is already committed by its basic decision: it has revived the S.A.S.—a strategic assault force is in existence, on paper. That is more than half the battle, but the real strategic value of the idea will be lost if, instead of consciously and positively creating an independent force that is "different", the War Office negatively allows the S.A.S. to degenerate into an "air-minded" rifle brigade kept going mainly by the enthusiasm of junior officers. Help and encouragement, and above all a clear comprehension of the purpose of the force, must come from above. It must be obvious, for instance, that high-level planning cannot be shackled to British experience in World War II; use must be made of everything that can be found out about foreign experience in this field both then and since. Britain can have no monopoly of ideas.

How would the Strategic Assault Corps be raised and run?

From the venturesome youth of Britain, within and outside the Services, and in the faith that this country possesses a fund of daring and enterprise for ever seeking an outlet. The schoolboy who is bored by the set-piece battle of the historians still thrills to stories of Border forays and privateering on the Spanish Main. Nothing has ever kept the British from such adventure, except the threat of hanging, and not always that. Nelson's "band of brothers", Clive winning an empire with his sword, were the forbears of the sea and desert raiders of the last war.

A delicate point occurs here. No army welcomes the freebooter

or encourages the leader of originality. Yet these are the first recruits to throng into the ranks when war breaks out—too often to be killed before they can display any quality besides courage. The survivors of the early battles, the Lawrences and Stirlings, have still somehow to win promotion before they can begin to show what they can really do. When the war is over, most of these innovators get out of uniform as quickly as they can, leaving a few stubborn comrades to carry on "until next time". Till then, "it's not on", in the Army idiom, to be too thrustful—and so the cycle is repeated.

This flow of daring should be caught and used. Already the S.A.S. must turn away volunteers. But if it were known that an élite brigade, standing high in the Army's and the nation's regard, sought young men with minds of their own for tasks of danger and importance, the reservoir of talent would overflow. And as it happens, the Corps' training, devised to tax to the utmost—and so satisfy—both mind and body, would include the remote but alluring hobbies of the rich: flying, mountaineering, ski-ing, yachting, foreign travel—such bait as no recruiting poster ever dangled.

For the "intellectual" soldier there would be topical research into the mode of life in Iron Curtain countries: their languages, customs and methods of internal security. The minds of assault troops must be made familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the peoples among whom they may need to work, and this could be done not only by blackboard lectures but also in comradeship with men from these countries—for why should not a "foreign legion" of volunteers be raised within the Corps in much the same way that Stirling brought French, Belgian and Greek squadrons into the wartime S.A.S.? Hundreds of Iron Curtain exiles would join tomorrow and dedicate themselves to preparation for freeing their homelands when and if the hour struck.

How would enthusiasm be sustained while danger is kept at bay?

Quite easily. The peace-time Corps would earn its keep by dashing off to meet "emergencies" in different parts of the world: prompt and skilled action can so often smother trouble at its source. Beyond that, every man would know that on his efforts and aptitudes the nation's safety might at any hour depend.

In every military area the Corps' liaison officers would constantly explain its true rôle, while in training and staff colleges "strategic assault" would stand high on the curriculum. In this way future leaders would be gleaned for early promotion instead of being passed over in favour of more typical "officer material".

How would the Corps differ from the Commandos?

Enormously, and the difference must be kept clear from the start. The merging of the Commandos into the Royal Marines acknowledged that their rôle is tactical: to provide the spearhead of conventional attack on enemy coastlines. They have their place of honour in the forefront of such landings, but strategic targets are outside their scope. Strategic assault troops, however, must be reserved for deep thrusts far behind the enemy lines; their training, structure and character would be wasted if used for jabbing at tactical objectives.

How would the Corps be employed in war?

As the supplest of weapons, the sharpest and most versatile, it would lay open what belligerents always seek: an exposed flank. To the two flanks, left and right, which are always strongly defended, the S.A.S. added a third—far in the rear where vigilance is lowest and vital injury can be inflicted at slight cost.

Objectives no conventional army can attain until it has won a full-scale battle may be reached by teams of daring, highly skilled men before the defenders have an inkling of their danger. This is the counterpart of strategic bombing; but while it takes today more than half a million pounds to put a single bomber in the air, the cost of the newer weapon is negligible. Consider one of the S.A.S.'s favourite targets—airfields. To cripple one air base, some twenty modern aircraft may be risked; the same job in desert days cost Stirling a few sticks of explosive and some drums of petrol.

Most bomber targets are "naturals" for strategic troops: mines, factories, marshalling yards, ports, power plants, rocket bases—and atomic centres which would have to be smoked out. As such targets are scattered underground, the bombers' value diminishes and the saboteurs' increases. Men can strike more surely than machines, and without their approach being announced by radar. They can appear from a cellar or scramble down a tree; they can walk in from the street among a hundred unsuspecting

others; and they work, not merely on a patchwork of intelligence reports, but on the evidence of their eyes and ears.

Nearer to the battle zone, shattering blows can be struck. Bridges, railways and tunnels suddenly blow up, signal and power lines go dead. With his plans in disarray the enemy is forced to squander forces on defensive precautions against the unknown, and thus conform his behaviour to our intentions. And then, in widening circles, begin the kidnapping and seduction of enemy officers. Not only will the opposing war leader have to double the guards on every battlement, but even in the council chamber (he had better scrutinise them frequently to make sure they are his men) while also keeping a sharp eye on the loyalty of his chief lieutenants.

Such may be the pattern as war starts to develop, but the supreme aim of the Strategic Assault Corps would be to intervene *before* the fatal order can be given, and every war-maker would know it. Even as he plots the hour of attack, he will be haunted by the dread of assassination or the possibility that an atomic time-bomb, introduced in pieces and assembled on the spot, may blast his entire headquarters off the map. Never have would-be conquerors been offered so cogent a reason for leaving well alone.

The first need is to attune our minds to a whirlwind type of warfare in which friend may not know foe, habit will play a traitor's part and victory must be got quickly, or not at all: precisely, the conditions in which the new force, shaped to tomorrow's ends, can be used with best effect. Through such a medium we can deploy our mother wit in our own way to keep an enemy in perplexity and fear: we can acquire the means to direct fire into his vitals, undermine his will to war and disrupt his capacity to wage it. And finally, this power to deter and to retaliate—"if necessary, alone"—will do much to make our voice heard in the world again.

Goliath may face Goliath, but the giant with a David on his side is likelier to win.

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When Hitler planned his bold Ardennes offensive against the Allies advancing from the west, it was Skorzeny the Führer tapped to lead "Operation Greif," the audacious attempt to infiltrate English-speaking Germans in American uniforms through Allied defenses to cause chaos far behind the lines. Skorzeny and his men threw the GIs into panic during the Battle of the Bulge: so frightened were General Dwight D. Eisenhower's advisers of Skorzeny that they forced Ike into hiding until "Old Blood and Guts," General George Patton, saved the day.

After the war, the victors tried to convict the dashing commando of "war crimes." Skorzeny's courage and chivalry so impressed the best of the British and Americans, however, that he was cleared of all charges, thanks to the able defense of his American counsel and the key testimony of the famed English commando Wing Commander Forrest Yeo-Thomas. Skorzeny's innocence in the eyes of the Allies did not spare him imprisonment by the postwar West German government, which was later to place this book, Commando Extraordinary, *on its index of books "dangerous to youth."* (Commando Extraordinary *has been translated into Hebrew and has long been recommended reading for Israel's military.)*

Otto Skorzeny escaped from a West German concentration camp in 1948 and fled to Spain. Active as an engineering and business consultant until his death in 1975, Europe's premier commando never broke faith with his SS comrades or his German fatherland.

Otto Skorzeny enjoys a cigarette in his cell in the witness wing of the Nuremberg jail in November 1945. Skorzeny continued to deny he was sent to kill Eisenhower and other high-ranking American officers.

"My escape from the Gran Sasso appears even today as the boldest, the most romantic of all, and at the same time the most modern in method."

—Benito Mussolini

Commando Extraordinary **tells the gripping story of Otto Skorzeny, the man who rescued Mussolini. This book reveals just why Skorzeny was Adolf Hitler's most feared commando, Nazi Germany's "most dangerous man." At the Führer's orders, the daring Austrian SS man snatched the Italian dictator from his heavily guarded prison high in the Appenines, foiled attempted treachery in Hungary by seizing its ruler's son, and threw the Allies into panic by his audacious plan to impersonate American GI's during the Battle of the Bulge. Thrill to Skorzeny's hairbreadth escapes, marvel at his bold tactics and his coolness under fire, be inspired by his old-world chivalry and romantic dash! This classic biography has been translated into languages, including Hebrew: this Austrian SS ma exploits inspired Israel's raiders on Entebbe and rem required reading for commandos and special forces arou the world.**

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